

# THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

ORIGINAL NARRATIVES OF THE JAMES BOYS

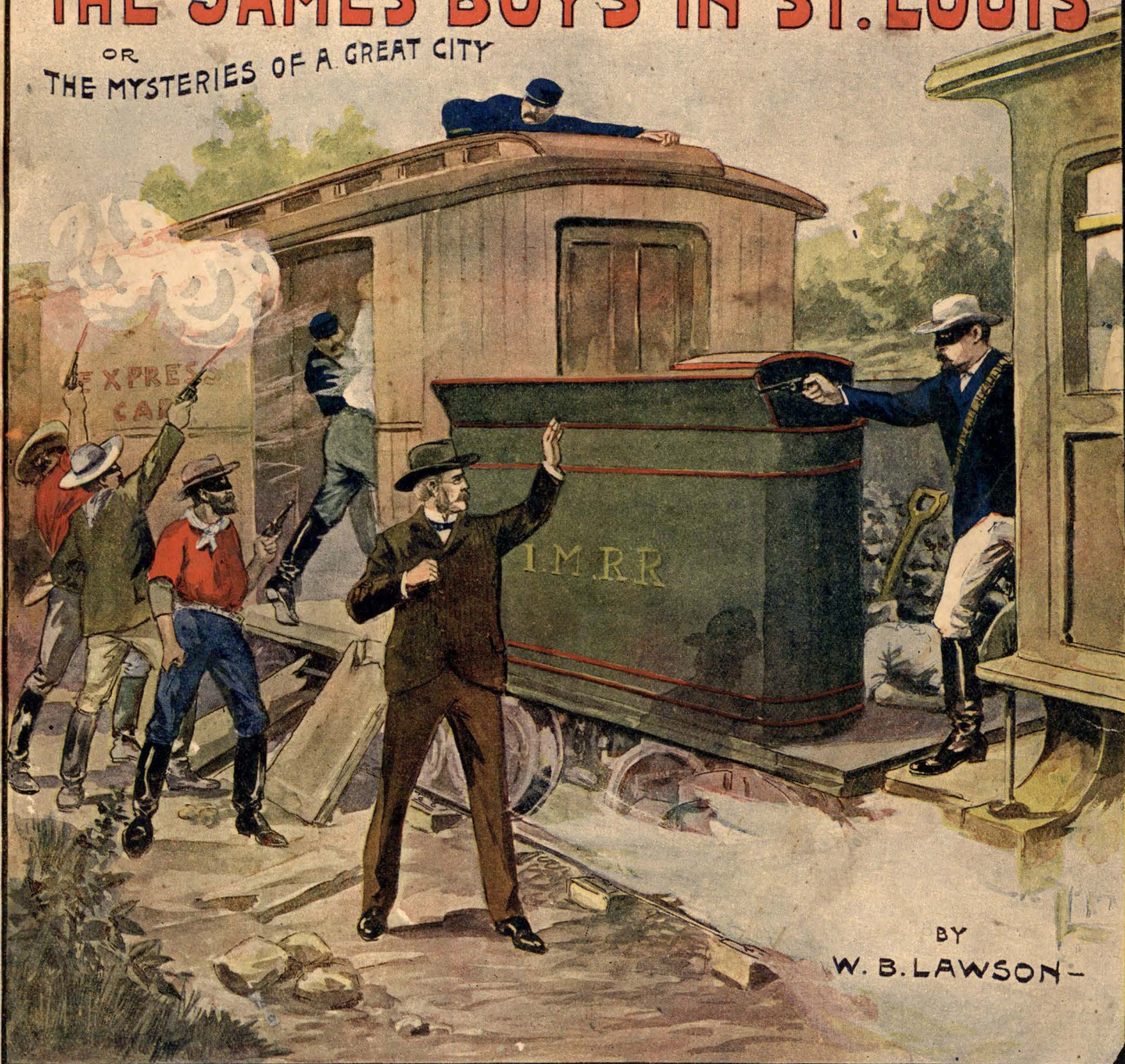
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## THE JAMES BOYS IN ST. LOUIS

OR  
THE MYSTERIES OF A GREAT CITY



BY  
W. B. LAWSON—

"DON'T YOU KNOW ME, JESSE?" CRIED THE DISGUISED FRANK JAMES AS HE FOUND HIMSELF COVERED BY HIS BROTHER'S REVOLVER.





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# THE JAMES BOYS IN ST. LOUIS;

OR,

## THE MYSTERIES OF A GREAT CITY.

By W. B. LAWSON.

### CHAPTER I.

#### JESSE JAMES IN DISGUISE.

"Put it thar, stranger! Glad to see yer! Reckon now er've heerd of P'isen Eyed Johnson, ain't ye? Waal, m' thet thar identical individual an' ther biggest man in ther county, if I do say it! Get down off yer horse an' hev a bit of refreshment, will ye?"

The invitation was emphasized by an offer of a large, muscular hand, and then the speaker, a curious-looking old plainsman, planted himself directly in the path, as if he did not intend to allow any refusals.

"Much obliged! Don't care if I do! You bet I've heard of you, Mr. Johnson, but I'll have to dispute that assertion, for I'm told that Jesse James is a resident of this county at present," was the answer, and Leroy

Harvey, a Pinkerton detective, dropped from the back of his mustang and stood by the side of the grizzled Colorado veteran.

He had been riding for nearly twenty-four hours, only stopping long enough to eat and feed his horse, so the invitation to refresh himself did not come amiss, in spite of the fact that he had stumbled accidentally upon his entertainer at a time when he least expected to meet a human being.

He was on a dangerous errand, and no one knew it better than himself, for the famous agency at Chicago had sent him with two others to track the outlaw Jesse James, and capture or kill him, whichever was easiest.

Hearing that the great robber had just crossed this section of the country, the three detectives were hot



on his trail, and this was the first time they had separated beyond hailing distance.

Having looked around curiously as he slid down from his horse and shook hands perfunctorily with the grizzled-bearded old Westerner—for he was keenly alive to anything that savored of suspicion, and the old patriarch's appearance was anything but prepossessing.

A commodious log cabin, with a low door and one small window, stood about forty feet in front of them, while the landscape, as far as eye could see, seemed an endless forest, rising in tier after tier of hills, until it finally ended on the horizon in a range of mountains.

At the detective's remark the old fellow chuckled, but he returned the young man's sharp look with a hawk-like glance from under his heavy eyebrows.

"Haw! haw! I reckon now Jess is a bigger man than me, stranger!" he answered, good-naturedly, "but yer've got it wrong erbout his bein' in Colorado. Jess an' his gang air a workin' further south, they say! I reckon now he's givin' Missouri a sample of his robbin' and plunderin'!"

"Then Missouri is getting more than her share, that's all I can say," laughed the detective, as he led his horse to a spring near by and started to water it.

"Jess has cleaned Missouri out pretty thoroughly, I've been told, but if you are right, then I've had my journey for nothing, for I've come all the way from St. Louis to bring Jess a message!"

"Great Snakes! You don't say so, stranger! Now what kind of a message mout it be, I'd like ter know!"

"How quick he bites!" thought the detective, as he noticed the eagerness of his companion's tones. "I'll go easy with the old greaser, I guess! That pair of eyebrows look rather suspicious!" Out loud he remarked, coolly:

"It's a secret message, for one thing, intended for no ear but the outlaw's, my friend; still, seeing Jess ain't here, and I've had my trouble for nothing, I don't mind telling you that the message is from Frank James, his brother."

"You don't say! Fire ahead! Thet thar's interestin' news, stranger! I used ter know ther pair of them rascals when they was leetle shavers livin' in Missouri!"

"Is that so? Well, Frank is in St. Louis at present, and what's more he's likely to stay there. He's robbed two banks and corralled a big haul, the biggest one he

ever made without his brother to help him, but he can't get out of the city, for the citizens have got wind o' him, and every avenue of escape is guarded!"

"Ther devil, you say! Thar's luck fer you, stranger. But I reckon now Jess'll hear on it somehow, an' git him out er his pickle!"

The detective raised his mustang's head and adjusted the bridle, and then discovered that his host's right hand had wandered to the butt of a fine-looking revolver that he wore tucked into the belt of his leather breeches.

"That's what I'm out here for, to tell Jess," he went on, coolly. "Frank's got two of the gang with him but——"

"Which two be they?" asked the old man, breaking in upon the sentence.

Harvey tied his horse to a sapling, and dropped down upon the ground near his beast before he answered.

"I'd better not tell that, I reckon; Frank wouldn't like it!" he said, decidedly, and then, as he saw his host grip his weapon tighter, his own hand dropped easily to the butt of a revolver.

"Bah! It can't do us harm! I reckon now yer kin trust me with yer errand, stranger, 'specially as I can't git away, hevin' no horse of any kind, and chock full of rheumatics."

He sat down stiffly on a stone about ten feet from the detective as he spoke, and almost the next second a horse could be heard whinnying on the other side of the cabin.

Harvey gave him a keen look, and then burst out laughing, but his fingers tightened a little on the butt of his revolver.

"First time I ever heard a panther or a catamount make that sort of a noise," he said, jovially. "So you haven't a horse of any kind, my fine fellow!"

"I reckon now that thar animal don't count," said the old fellow, grimly. "Thet's only er poor, lame critter thet come limpin' by ther cabin one day, an' bein' as how I'm fond of all horseflesh, I doctored it up er leetle."

"I'll have a look at it if you don't mind," remarked the detective, rising.

There was a snap of a trigger and the old fellow's pistol-muzzle turned like a flash in Harvey's direction.

"Set down! When I want yer ter see ther horse I'll tell yer! I reckon now yer most too pryin' ter be er pleasant companion, stranger."



The detective dropped back into his original position, and assumed an air of perfect indifference.

"You're off your feed, pard! I'm not hankering to see the creature. I thought perhaps it might be the thoroughbred that I lost last week. She was as black as a coal and had a white star in her forehead. Finest Arabian stock, and answered to the name of 'Fleet-wind.'"

"What ther deuce! Hold on, stranger! Quit yer jokin', or it'll be ther wuss fer yer!" roared the old fellow, rising. "I reckon now yer ain't lookin' fer trouble, but, if yer be, I kin give it to yer by ther barrellfull! Thar ain't no horse in ther country answers ter thet description except one owned by Jesse James, an' I reckon now ther robber hez ther critter with him somewhars down in Missouri!"

"And I reckon you're mistaken," remarked the detective, grimly, rising as he spoke. "I happen to know that my horse was a black thoroughbred, with a white star on its forehead, and I believe you've got her hidden behind that shanty! That's why you don't want me to see her! You think I'll claim her!"

He drew his revolver as he spoke, and put his finger on the trigger, and like a flash the old fellow did the same.

Standing ten feet apart with drawn weapons, they glared at each other, and at that very second the horse behind the cabin whinnied again.

"I say it is the thoroughbred! Deny it if you dare!" roared Harvey.

"I tell you it's er sick mustang, as gray as my beard, curse you!" growled the other.

His eyes glittered with a steely light as he spoke, and at the last words his assumed accent almost deserted him.

With one of the keen glances for which Harvey was noted in his profession, the clever disguise which the old hermit wore was finally penetrated.

"Jesse James himself, by thunder!" flashed through the detective's brain; then he forced himself to be as calm as ever.

Harvey shoved his revolver back into his belt, as though he had no further use for it, and at the same time the outlaw's hand dropped.

It was as clear to him now as though some one had told him. The bewhiskered old hermit was the famous

outlaw in disguise, while the log cabin was nothing more nor less than one of his many hiding-places.

It was a thrilling situation, but a feeling of pleasure shot through Harvey's veins as he realized that at last he was face to face with the man whose body, living or lifeless, was worth ten thousand dollars to the Government.

He had been searching Colorado for a month, knowing that the outlaw was there, but although he had traced him from point to point, this was the first glimpse he had had of him, and this was purely accidental. He had stumbled upon the cabin during a search for water, and now that he recognized his quarry, he was at his wits ends how to capture him and yet live to tell the story.

He could have put a bullet into the outlaw's body, and get one in his own at the same time, but that would not afford him much satisfaction.

Like a flash he realized that he must outwit the robber, a thing which he had always heard was next to impossible.

Luckily for him, he had partially provided against just such an emergency, so without betraying his knowledge by so much as a change in expression, he prepared for what was coming.

"Waal, hev I called ther turn, stranger?" went on the outlaw. "Be yer lookin' fer Jess an' expectin' ter find him hyar in Colorado?"

"I've been looking for Jess, and I did expect to find him in this State," he began, with apparent candor. "I saw Frank James a month ago, and he told me the direction that his brother was taking——"

"Stop right thar!" roared the old fellow, jerking back the hammer of his pistol. "Throw up your hands, —— you! I'll jest relieve yer of thet thar pop! Thar!"

He jerked Harvey's pistol out of his belt as he spoke, and stuffed it into one of his bootlegs.

Then he walked over to the mustang as he spoke, forgetting to limp as he went, and before Harvey could guess his intentions, he put his little finger to his lips and gave a low whistle.

Instantly a young girl darted out of the cabin in answer to his call, and as she passed the detective, she gave him a quick glance from a pair of flashing, black eyes, and then turned her back upon him. Without a word she unhitched the mustang and led it away, but, before she disappeared around the corner of the cabin, Harvey



had guessed that she was Unitah, the girl from Wyoming, whose name had been coupled with the outlaws, and who was known to be desperately in love with the famous bandit. A second Calamity Jane, and I'll bet on it!" muttered Harvey, under his breath, "only this one is a beauty!"

"Git er move on, stranger!" ordered the outlaw, at that point. "Yer ter be my guest here for a while. Ther gal will see to ther feedin' of ther horse, an' thar's er bite in ther cabin yender fer visitors. I'm er bit particklar in my ways, young man, ez I reckon yer kin see, but bein' ez how ye're my guest fer ther time, yer mout ez well knuckle ter ther leetle peculiarities gracefully."

He chuckled as he spoke and pointed to the door, so Harvey had no alternative but to proceed in that direction, his host bringing up the rear with his finger on the trigger of his weapon.

A companion of the detective's was waiting in the woods within the sound of a pistol shot, and would come to his aid at a signal, but there was no way of giving them the signal, except by allowing the outlaw to use him as a target.

The situation was bad, but it was not without interest, and every drop of blood in his body tingled as he realized his danger.

With a grim determination in mind to regain his liberty, he walked straight to the door, but at the first glimpse inside his courage waned a little.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE LETTER FOR FRANK JAMES.

Inside of the cabin were two men and a woman, the latter being the wife of Hank Watrous, one of the worst characters in the James gang, and consequently one of the worst in the country.

This woman, who was lean and haggard from the hard life she had lived with her outlaw husband, was bending over a kettle of stewed meat which hung on a tripod over a fire in one corner.

The two men were cleaning rifles, and both looked up curiously when Harvey entered, but neither of them spoke until Jesse James filled up the doorway with his stalwart body.

"Hullo, P'izen Eye! Who's yer company?" asked Hank, giving a wink at his companion.

"I reck'n yer'll hev ter ask himself ef yer want to know," was the surly answer, and Jesse James exchanged winks with his men over Harvey's shoulder.

"Yer shouldn't be so all-fired smart, P'izen Eye. Yer'll git took in some day," went on Hank, with another grin. "Who knows but what ther stranger is er member of ther James gang, an' not er fit associate fer honest people?"

Even the woman grinned at this, but Harvey saw his opportunity, and promptly improved it.

"Suppose I am one of the cut-throat gang! What difference does it make? You are only a pack of horse thieves!" he said, coolly.

"Snakes! Hark ter thet thar, will ye! Well, I'll be cursed ef he ain't got narve!" laughed the other fellow who had just hung up his rifle.

"He's ez full er impudence ez er horn is full of powder," chuckled Jesse James. "He 'lows he's from St. Louis with er message from Frank James ter Jesse. Frank hez corraled a rich swag an' they've got him dodgin' in ther city. He can't git erway from ther place ter enjoy his pickin's."

"Whar's ther stuff, stranger? Did he tell yer thet thar?" asked Hank, eagerly.

Harvey dropped down upon a pile of skins about half way across the room and spread out his legs comfortably before he answered:

"What's the use of me telling tales?" he asked, disgustedly. "You are treating me meaner than dirt, when the chances are even that you're as bad as I am."

"Give him a square deal, P'izen Eye, so long ez yer don't know nothin' erbout him," said Hank, scowling. "Ther stranger's only one ter three, ter say nothin' of ther women, so thar's no show fer him doin' any particklar damage."

"You hold yer jaw! I'll do ez I please erbout thet thar!" was the prompt answer, as Jesse James seated himself in the doorway, with his finger still on his weapon.

"He thinks I'm a sleuthhound, and I think he's a horse-thief," went on Harvey, grimly. "So it's only natural that we should hate each other, but there's one thing in my favor, I don't have to hide my face."

He looked the outlaw squarely in the eye as he spoke, but in a minute he could see that his cleverness in noticing the disguise had aroused the suspicions of the others.



"I reck'n P'izen Eye is right! Ther chap knows too much," said Hank, after a minute's deliberation. "I 'low now 't wouldn't do us harm ter go through his pockets! He mout hev some papers or er badge or something."

"Thet thar's what I wuz expectin' ter do when I got er round ter it," remarked the outlaw king, taking a chew of tobacco. "I reck'n now he can't prove I ain't P'izen Eye Johnson, and ef I kin find er paper——"

"Go ahead and search, curse you!" growled Harvey, assuming to be angry. "I told you my errand here, but if you want to prove it, all right, only I warn you you'll answer to the James gang if you destroy what you find in my pockets!"

The words were spoken with so much sincerity that once more the three outlaws glanced at each other, and then, as the woman began setting bowls for the stew before them, Hank strode across the room and grabbed Harvey roughly by the collar.

A blow from the detective's fist, squarely in the eye, staggered him for a minute and set the others off into roars of laughter.

"Hold on, you old lubber! Go easy if you want to search me!" roared the detective, savagely. "I said you were welcome to look at the contents of my pocket, but I didn't say you could shake the breath out of my body while you were doing it."

Jesse James sprang to his feet, and taking Hank by the shoulder, he swung him around and then shoved him back to his corner with the ease of a giant.

"Haw! haw! Thet thar wuz er steff right-hander an' no mistake!" he roared, delightedly. "Cursed ef ther feller ain't got more grit than I thought! Now, then, young feller, give me er look inter them poccks!"

He had not lowered his weapon an inch and, in spite of his laughter, there was an ugly look in his eyes which Harvey had the good sense to understand as meaning business.

Assuming a resentful air, he drew a letter from his pocket and handed it to the disguised outlaw, who started in surprise when he saw the superscription.

"Hold on there!" yelled Harvey, as the outlaw started to tear open the envelope. "What the devil do you mean by opening another man's letter? The outside ought to be enough to show you that I'm not lying!"

"Shut up!" was the answer, in the outlaw's own voice,

and then Jesse James jerked the letter from the envelope and turned to his companions.

"The fellow is telling the truth! The letter is from Frank!" he said, in a suppressed tone; "and I came near riddling him outside there!"

"What does he say?" asked the woman, stopping in the middle of the floor, and putting her hands on her hips.

"Shut up, you hag!" bellowed her husband, but the woman went on, defiantly, with her eyes on the detective's face:

"Ther gal, there, Unitah, she dreamt erbout Frank last night. She dreamt he wuz in trouble an' er wantin' help. She's er great one fer dreamin', Unitah is, an' she said ez how we'd run ercross er blue-eyed spy in er day or two, but I reck'n yer can't be him, bein' ez you've fetched the letter."

"Let up, will yer, and hear what ther cap'n hez ter say!" ordered Hank Watrous, between two enormous knife-fuls of stew.

Jesse James folded the paper and put it in the envelope, facing Harvey as he did so.

"Look here, young man! This is a serious business," he began. "Will you swear that this letter was written by my brother? If you can't it will go hard with you, for I will show you no mercy!"

"Are you Jesse James?"

Harvey asked the question sharply, at the same time looking the outlaw squarely in the eye as though trying to read his features.

With a deft movement, the outlaw detached the false hair from his face, and straightened himself up with an air of self-consciousness.

"Do I look like him?" he asked, after a minute's silence.

"I don't know; I never saw him, but you look like Frank James," said the detective, shrewdly, "and I'm willing to take your word for it that you are the fellow that owns the letter."

At that second a pistol cracked twice just outside the shanty. Instantly it flashed through his mind that these two shots, fired by some one, he did not know who, would bring his companions to his rescue.

Hank Watrous had bounded outside at the first crack, and Jesse James, without turning his eyes from his captive, yelled out an imprecation:



"Curse the girl! I told her not to fire her weapon! Who knows how many sneaks may be skulking around! Fetch her in here, Hank, and be quick about it!"

Unitah dashed into the cabin while he was speaking, with her smoking revolver in one hand and a jack rabbit in the other.

"What's the harm? I thought we'd need this fellow for supper," she began, but after a look at the outlaw's face, she turned as pale as ashes.

"Good Heavens! What have I done, Jess? The fellow isn't a detective, is he?" she cried, sharply.

"I don't know what he is—I'm trying to find out!" growled the outlaw. "He may be a friend, and he may be an enemy, but either way you ought to know better than to fire when we are all inside!"

Turning quickly back to the detective, the outlaw said:

"Now then, young man, will you answer my question? I want you to swear that Frank James wrote that letter, and I want to know exactly how it came in your possession!"

The outlaw's voice was a rough growl now, and Harvey knew that this time he would be obliged to answer.

"Hang you! I'm no dog to be bullied," he began. "No, I didn't see Frank James when he wrote the letter, but you've got it safely, and my errand is done. Now, if you are cur enough to shoot me, go ahead and do it!"

There was the click of a hammer and a woman's cry, and Unitah fell heavily against the outlaw's arm, sending his bullet flying, and at that very second the reports from two other weapons sounded simultaneously.

"Whoop! Look out thar, Jess! Git out'n range of ther door!" yelled Hank Watrous, bounding in. "Thar's spies in ther brush yonder, and they've shot ther gal! Quick, or they'll be right on top of us!"

Jesse James acted with the speed of lightning, thereby proving the quickness of thought in emergencies for which he was so noted.

Grabbing the old woman by the shoulders, he forced her in front of him, then, using her body as a shield, he hurried out of the building.

Not fifty yards away were the two mounted detectives with their revolvers turned on the shanty door, but the outlaw held the woman's body in a grip of iron, and walking backward made his way around the corner of the shanty.

Not wishing to be caught inside, Hank followed his

leader, and got out safely, but as the third outlaw reached the door, he fell like a log with a bullet in his heart, and lay half in and half out across the threshold.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

The weapons of the outlaws spoke merrily, and were answered promptly by others.

Harvey darted out, and came face to face with Will Star, one of his two companions.

"Hello Harvey! What is up? Who are those two ducks that Fred is after?" yelled Star, pointing to the two outlaws who were galloping across the hill, with Fred Marcy, the third detective, in hot pursuit of them.

"After them, Star! It's Jesse James himself!" yelled Harvey, excitedly. "See the fellow is firing at Fred, and by thunder! He's hit him!"

The crack of a revolver echoed his words, and at that instant they saw Fred Marcy pitch headlong from his saddle.

Star put spurs to his horse and dashed to the rescue of his friend, leaving Harvey cursing the loss of his mustang and consequently his ability to follow.

While Star was off after his friend, Harvey went back into the cabin and made it his first duty to disarm the two women.

Unitah had a flesh wound in her arm which was bleeding profusely, but her black eyes flashed as angrily as ever as the detective bent over her.

"Have they caught Jesse?" she asked, as if that was all she cared to know.

"No, curse him! He got away!" answered Harvey, angrily.

He heard hoofbeats, and, going out again, met his two companions in front of the cabin.

Marcy had been hit in the shoulder, but although the blow had knocked him off of his horse, it was not very serious, and Star had bandaged it with the skill born of long practice in that line of business.

"Curse the coward! He shielding himself behind a woman!" were the injured man's first words.

"I knew it was Jesse James the minute I saw him do that dirty trick. He'd sacrifice his own mother, I believe, to save his miserable carcass!"

"Your bullets did good work all right, Fred! Look



there!" cried Star, pointing to the dead outlaw in the doorway.

"Better than you think, old man," laughed Harvey. "Your first one winged a girl and saved my life; she's the Indian maiden, Unitah! Come in and see her!"

"Great Scott! Why she's a she-devil, they say," muttered Marcy, as they stepped over the body. "She's a broncho-buster and the best shot in the Rockies!"

Five minutes later the three were outside again, taking a look at the bushes.

Unitah had only stared at them sullenly, while the old woman did not even notice them, but they were too concerned over the outlaws to give much thought to their reception.

### CHAPTER III.

#### HOT ON THE TRAIL.

An hour later the detectives were still outside and the women inside the shanty, but there was no sign of the outlaws returning.

Harvey had collected all the firearms he could find in the cabin, which consisted of two revolvers and a rifle, and the three had dragged the dead outlaw's body some distance away and hidden it in the bushes.

Unitah was improving slowly under the old woman's care, but she still kept a sullen silence and only stared at the three young men defiantly when they attempted to talk to her.

"What do you think of her?" asked Harvey, as he finished a bowl of stew which he had carried outside.

"She's a tartar, all right, and so is the old woman! It's lucky you corraled the rifles or she'd be plugging us full of bullets. The question now is, what are we going to do with her?" was Star's answer.

"Leave her here, of course!" said Marcy, promptly. "We're not in the country to rescue wildcats! There's no hope of getting a word of information out of either one of them, and so what's the use of bothering with them?"

"They'd only hamper us, and we're a horse short now," said Harvey, slowly. "I'm wondering how we are to go on from here. There's a ranch fifteen miles to the east where we might buy a horse——"

"Pshaw! The girl is too pretty to leave behind, be-

sides they'll starve to death without a rifle," remarked Star.

"Getting sentimental over the little half-breed, are you!" sneered Marcy.

"I'm sorry for her," began Star, glumly, "and I'd tame her if I could, but of course business is business, and——"

"And we've got to get a move on if we expect to capture that robber, for, of course, he'll make tracks for St. Louis right away to rescue his brother."

Harvey chuckled as he spoke, for he was thinking of the letter, which was only a bogus affair, concocted by the three detectives.

Frank James was really in St. Louis at the date of the letter, and it was reported that he had stolen a large amount of specie which was hidden somewhere in that city, and which he was trying in every way to ship to a place of safety.

The authorities at St. Louis had discovered who was the thief, but up to the day the detectives left they had not located either the robber or the plunder.

They waited several hours before the shanty, keeping close watch upon the bushes in hopes of the outlaws returning, perhaps with reinforcements; then leaving Star behind, Marcy and Harvey made a short cut across the hills to the ranch, where they hoped to procure an extra animal.

It was a ticklish position for Star, but he carried a brace of good pistols in his belt, and, besides, there was an extra rifle and plenty of ammunition.

He had discovered that there was only one way to enter or leave the shanty, and as the window overlooked the door, he could easily pick off any one that approached, and, thanks to Unitah, there was plenty of food in the place, if the old woman could be prevailed upon to cook it.

It was necessary to keep one eye on this female at first, but as Unitah fainted suddenly and looked in danger of dying, the poor creature forgot her loyalty to her brute husband, and became more of a woman. She tended the girl well, feeding her broth, and pouring some sort of a liniment over her wound, and at last Star won her confidence to some extent and wormed out of her quite a number of the outlaw's secrets.

"Jess hez heerd of Fank's haul," she said, indifferently. "He wuz er tryin' ter git ter Denver when two of his



critters sickened on him. Fleetwind wuz ther only horse left, an' ther three on 'em couldn't ride her——"

"So my mustang just came in handy?" broke in Harvey.

"I reck'n it did, bein' ez how Pigeon Toe wuz shot," went on the old creature. "Thet thar made ther deal even, an' give 'em er chance ter bolt. I 'low they're half-way ter ther Lone Injun diggins by this time. Thet thar's whar Jess would make tracks fer fust, I reck'n."

"How far is it from here?" asked the detective, quickly.

"Shut up your mouth, Nance Watrous! You're talkin' too much!" warned Unitah, sharply.

Star, who was a handsome fellow, gave the young girl a smile, and for just a minute her lids drooped uneasily.

"He's deserted you, my girl, so why should you protect him?" he asked, quickly. "Hang the fellow! He don't know but that I am murdering you this minute!"

"Jess wouldn't keer ef you killed us both in cold blood, an' neither would Hank," said the woman, stolidly. Unitah's er fool ter keer fer ther cap'n! He'll be er usin' her fer er shield fer his own carcass later."

"Never! Jess wouldn't do that!" burst out the girl, fiercely; then she added, in a suppressed voice: "He wouldn't have to! I'd give my life for his any minute, Nance Watrous!"

"Ye're er fool, Unitah!" said the old woman again. "Yer'd do well ter take warnin' of me an' not put yer faith in robbers!"

Star had been sitting in the door as they talked and gazing about him uneasily, for the sun was almost down, and there was no sign as yet of the return of his companions.

The night was growing chilly, and he would soon be forced to go inside, or else back and forth on the outside all night, which was a thing he did not relish, after a long day in the saddle.

The old woman cooked the rabbit without any ado, and brought a portion of it out to the tree stump where he had taken up his position, after a journey of inspection around the shanty.

While he was eating he caught a glimpse of Unitah's face at the window, and then, before he realized what had happened, the old woman had shut the door and padlocked it, and he was left to spend the night in the solitude of the forest.

A faint whistle, sounding far away over the hills, sur-

prised him after a little, and, climbing up into a high tree at the rear of the shanty, he was able to make out the forms of a half-a-dozen horsemen approaching each other from different directions.

Dropping from the tree, he made vigorous strides back and forth toward the bushes in several directions, then walking backward and stepping carefully in the tracks that led from the tree, he climbed once more into the branches.

The six horsemen had met now just at the summit of a knoll and, although the light was fading, he was able to recognize Jesse James, as well as the magnificent horse that he was still riding.

"Hang those two cats! If I was inside of the shanty I could defy them all," he muttered, as he watched the gang of robbers. "They're coming this way! So the old hag was wrong after all!"

He strained his eyes, and soon saw the band of outlaws separate as though they intended to approach the cabin from different directions.

"Which means they'll get a shot at me from every side, if they see me," he thought, anxiously. Then he crouched in the tree and waited, with one finger on the trigger of Pigeon Toe's weapon.

Three long, shrill whistles almost underneath him cut the air a moment later, and they were promptly answered by some one inside of the shanty. Then one of the horsemen emerged from the shadow of the trees directly in front of the door, out of range of Star's pistol, but in aggravatingly plain hearing.

"Hello, inside! Hi thar, Unitah!" called a coarse voice, cautiously.

"Whar's Jess?" retorted a voice that the detective recognized as Unitah's.

"You talk first! Whar's them whelps that chased us, Unitah? Who wuz they, anyway, an' whar be they er skulkin'?"

"Two of 'em have gone to the Watson ranch fer horses," answered the girl, promptly. "You needn't be afraid to help us out of here, for the other is as dead as a door nail, right here in the shanty. Have you brought us a horse, Nick Perkins?"

Harvey strained his ears to hear what would follow this extraordinary bit of information, and a low crackling in the bushes showed him that another horseman was approaching.



"Ef thet thar's ther case, you two females will hev ter take keer of yerselves," said the voice again. "Jess can't afford ter hang around this hyar section till they've all three been riddled. I'll leave er horse fer yer hyar, an' ef yer don't make good use on him, there ain't no one ter blame but yerselves. I'm off with Jess ter ther Lone In-jin diggin's."

He turned his horse as he spoke, and dashed away through the bushes, while Star ground his teeth at not being able to get a shot at him.

In a second he was out of the tree and making his way around the shanty.

The girl had lied for herself, no doubt, still he hesitated about taking the horse which he knew she relied upon to give her her freedom.

"It can't be helped. Jess will get away if I don't," he muttered, as he grasped the bridle.

Instantly a revolver cracked, and his hand dropped to his side, while Unitah's voice rang out like a bugle:

"Touch that bridle again, if you dare! Ha! ha! You thought you had all of the weapons, didn't you?"

She came toward him from the cabin door as she spoke, holding a cocked revolver in her hand, which the outlaw had just left near the door, and, before he could recover from the sting of the bullet, she was in the saddle and had turned the horse's head toward the distant mountains.

"Good-by, Nance!" she cried, merrily, as she dashed away. "Sorry to leave you, but this horse won't carry two at the pace I mean to ride him! I'll tell Jess to send for you when he gets the time! Ha! ha! I've tricked you once, if you are a detective!"

The last was screamed at Star, who was holding his wrist. The old woman was not inclined to take her desertion so calmly.

Star shut off her imprecations with an angry order, and then forced her, at the point of his own weapon, to bandage his wrist properly.

Fortunately, it was the left hand that had been injured, so he was able to use his weapon, and an hour later found him inside the cabin, with the door securely bolted, and keeping guard not only of the door, through the medium of the window, but also of the old woman's every look and action.

Midnight drew near, and yet there was not a sign of his friends, and Star was beginning to think they had met

with foul play, when he heard horses galloping toward the shanty.

The old woman raised her head, and, just as he was about to venture a yell from the window, she suddenly put her finger to her lips and gave a shrill whistle.

It was answered instantly, and then a series of signals were exchanged, which were too intricate for the detective to fathom at that minute.

One thing he knew, and that was that it was not his friends who had drawn up before the door, for the old woman's face had grown fairly radiant with pleasure.

Gripping his revolver firmly, he stood close by the window, and as the woman made a movement to cross the floor, he muttered a warning.

"Touch that door and you are a dead woman! Do you think I'll allow you to let those cutthroats in here?"

The woman slunk back, and just then Hank Watrous kicked heavily against the logs and demanded admittance.

"Hello, inside, thar! Open the door, Nance!" he bel-lowed.

"I can't do it, Hank! Ther stranger's got er bead on me!" called the woman, shrilly.

A moment's silence followed, and then Hank reported the statement to some one who appeared to be waiting at a little distance from the shanty.

"You see, I told you he was there, Jess!" called out a woman's voice, and, even in his excitement, Star recognized Unitah.

Star moved to one side of the window, keeping close to the wall, so that a bullet could not touch him, and listened to the brief conversation that followed.

"I tell you I won't go on until those fellows are dead!" roared Jesse James. "Don't you suppose I know they wrote that letter?"

"What'll we do, then, Jess?" asked another voice. "Shall I smash in ther door?"

"I've got something better than that," was the outlaw's answer. "We'll need our bullets, and we don't need the shanty. Set fire to the old hut! I guess that will rout them both out."

"My God! This won't do! You can't be burnt up!" cried Star, as he realized their danger. Then, as quick as a flash, he thrust his revolver out of the window and pulled the trigger.

A yell from Hank was accompanied with a terrific explosion. Then, as the detective darted back out of the



way of a volley of bullets that poured in at the window, a blaze of light leaped up from somewhere and illumined every corner of the cabin.

One of the bullets struck the crouching figure of the woman, and she straightened out upon the skins without a groan. Then, as Star heard the dry logs crackling all about him, there came the crack of firearms outside and a bedlam of surprised shouts and curses from the outlaws.

What had happened he did not know, but he made a quick rush for the door and began working at the rusty padlock.

He could tell that the outlaws had been fired upon and that a hot fight was in progress, but the key that fitted the padlock was in the dead woman's hand, and as he turned to wrest it from her grasp, there was a roar and a flash, and for a second it seemed as though the whole shanty was shooting skyward.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE RIPPLE CREEK BROOK.

When Star regained his senses he found himself under a tree, with Fred Marcy and a stranger bending over him.

"Hello! He's all right, after all!" cried Marcy, in astonishment. "Hanged if I don't think you bear a charmed life, old man! I never expected to find you alive after that fire."

"The old woman is burned to a cinder!" called Harvey, as he came up, "and there are two dead outlaws within ten feet of the ruins, so it's been a good night's work for us, even if we didn't catch his royal highness."

"He's been chased through Colorado by every sheriff in ther State," said the stranger, who was giving Star a drink of whisky out of a pocket flask, "and thet thar hoss of his shows her heels to all on 'em, while I 'low Jess is proof ag'in' bullets."

"That girl put a bullet through my hat brim, all right," said Harvey, examining his sombrero; then he gave a sharp glance at the sky and another at the bushes.

"Come, boys! We must get out of this! Put him on the broncho, Pete, and I'll lead him; that is, if he'll let me," he said, anxiously. "We can't take the risk of stopping here, for I've been told Jess has a friend behind every tree in Colorado."

"I'm all right, so you won't have to lead the horse," said Star, staggering to his feet. "I'm a bit scorched, I guess, but I'm not dead by a long shot! How the devil did you manage to lick those fellows, anyhow?"

"They were so anxious to roast you brown that they forgot to look behind 'em," laughed Harvey, holding his hand to help Star into the saddle. "We slid up behind them and peppered them for fair, but Jess got away on that cyclone of his, as usual, confound him!"

"They're bound for the Lone Injun Diggins', wherever that is," said Star, as soon as he was seated and had a grip on his bridle. "I got that much out of the old woman, Nance Watrous. Now, how in thunder did you save me, boys? The last I remember was thinking I was going heavenward on the tail of a comet."

He looked down at his friends as he spoke, and Harvey laughed and jerked the stirrup of his own animal into shape as he answered:

"Lucky for you, old man, the door blew in as the roof blew up! Jess had dumped powder here and there, and the force was every which way. I caught a glimpse of you in the red-hot box, and had just time to jump in and grab you."

"Then I owe my life to you! Hope it will be my turn next, old fellow."

"Pshaw! We're in this deal to stand by each other. But come on, old man, and move easy at first, as I've a notion you're pretty well blistered, even if you haven't discovered it."

Star was reeling in his saddle, but he held on bravely, and when they reached the top of the first knoll he was feeling better.

The stranger, whom he had found to be a cow puncher from the Watson ranch, was riding in the lead, while Harvey and Marcy rode on either side of their injured companion.

The moon was bright enough to show them their way, but the scene had changed considerably before Star felt able to ask a question.

"Where are you going now, boys? I ain't a bit particular, but I'm just a little curious."

Harvey laughed, and then called to Pete Spencer for the information.

"You said Jess was bound for ther Lone Injun, didn't yer? Wall, if thet thar's ther case, we'd better make fer Injun Pass. It's er narrer strip between ther rocks, where



we kin pick 'em off easy; thet is, ef we're cute enough ter fool old Uncle Ajax."

"Who the deuce is Uncle Ajax? I never heard of him before, and I thought I knew most of the celebrities," said Harvey, laughing.

Pete gave a sharp glance over the hills, and then lowered his voice, as if he was afraid the bushes might hear him as he offered a somewhat astounding explanation.

"Uncle Ajax is er hunter what was killed by ther James gang in '79, or leastwise, they thought they'd killed him when they left him strung up ter er tree that growed near ther pass," he began, mysteriously. "There's a story hereabouts thet er catermount chawed ther rope in two er tryin' ter git at ther body, an' was so scart when it saw Uncle Ajax walk off ther minute his feet teched ther ground thet he let out er howl and tumbled off'n ther limb in a fit."

"That's a good one, all right," began Harvey, but Star stopped him.

"I've heard that yarn before. So the old fellow is still living, is he?"

"You bet! But ther quare thing erbout it is thet ther James gang don't believe it, and fer thet thar reason they hate ther pass! They think Uncle Ajax is er spook, an' Jess, in particklar, is all-fired superstitious! He's got er notion in his head that them as he hangs can't possibly come ter life, an' he's mostly kerrect, 'cept in ther case of Uncle Ajax."

"Hello! what have we here?" said Marcy, as he pulled up suddenly on the crest of a ridge and took a sharp look ahead.

"Rough country, for one thing, and water of some sort," answered Harvey, drawing rein alongside of him.

"It's ther Ripple Creek brook," said the cow puncher, after a careful glance. "Ther devil only knows whar thet thar stream goes to or what it ever run in this hyar direction fer, anyway! Thar ain't no gettin' nigh ther bank ter water er critter on account of ther bushes growin' so tarnal close tergether."

"Is it deep?" asked Harvey, starting slowly down the hill.

"I reckon now thar's spots thet would make er giant flounder, but ther most of it is ez shaller ez er milkpan in ther dry season," was the answer.

They rode slowly down the hill, striking a sort of cow-

path at the bottom, which zigzagged near the stream, but was separated from it by dense bushes.

The moon sank behind clouds and the night grew dark as they proceeded, and Star was beginning to suffer intense pain from the burns upon his face and arms, so they halted for a few minutes while he laid on the ground and rested.

"I can't understand how we all escaped in that fracas up yonder," said Harvey, thoughtfully. Jess——"

"Hold on! Talk soft thar! Some one's skulkin' nigh hyar!" warned the cow puncher, sharply.

They all listened a minute, but could hear nothing but the bark of a wolf far back in the mountains.

Marcy dropped from his horse, and examined the ground, and was rewarded by finding the fresh hoof-prints of horses.

"Some one is ahead, that's sure, and not far ahead either," he said, as he remounted. "We'll move easy and do less talking, so we can do more listening."

"I was sure I heerd er rustle," said the cow puncher, softly. "I reckon now we'd make dead easy targets er movin' in this hyar fashion."

"Then we'll bunch up a bit," said Harvey, as he waited for Star to mount, then the four, riding as closely as they could, picked their way along the rough path that skirted the stretch of wooded country.

After this a mile was ridden in silence without a suspicious sound being heard, and they were just beginning to feel comparatively easy in their minds when a peculiar cry broke the stillness.

"A panther! By Jove, what a blood-curdler!" exclaimed Marcy, in a low voice.

"I'll bet ten to one it was a wildcat!" retorted Harvey, promptly.

There was a moment's silence and the cry came again, and Pete Spencer, who was born a hunter, let out a roar of amusement.

"'Tain't neither one! It's er woman!" he said, coolly. "She's signalin' ter some one! I reckon now it's ther spirit of ther mountains!"

"Get out! One ghost at a time is enough!" said Star, laughing softly. "But I think he was right! It did sound like a woman!"

"I hope it's not Unitah! I'd rather face the——"

"There's a light ahead!" cried Marcy, suddenly, as



they rounded a sharp cowpath that they had been following.

Pete pulled up with a jerk, and let out a characteristic exclamation.

"Thet thar's er suspicious light, too, in my opinion," he added. "I 'low something hez happened ter Jess, as thar ain't no one else likely to be goin' this way this mornin'!"

"Then we have got to move easy, or not move at all," said Harvey, quickly. "If we knew he was alone it would be one thing, but we don't. He may have been joined by a dozen of his pals since he left the shanty."

Pete dropped from his horse and put his ear to the ground.

"Thar ain't no hoss an' thet thar's all I want ter know," he said, warily.

A moment of consultation followed his statement, and then Harvey dismounted from his horse and, as Pete took a roundabout course over the hill, intending to come up on the other side of the light, he crept softly ahead on foot to reconnoiter.

As he stole along he discovered that the light was a reflection upon the shallow stream which he could see at intervals through the bushes, and that the reflection came from a small fire which was burning under a shelving rock which overhung the stream, and was almost hidden among the bushes.

Working his way as stealthily as an Indian, he got nearly to the rock, but could see no possible way of looking under it.

Still the reflection showed that the fire was blazing merrily, and, knowing that it could not have been made without hands, he noiselessly dropped down upon the ground and listened.

The first sound that greeted his ears was the hiss of fire in the water, as some one kicked the burning embers into the stream and began stamping on the ashes.

"I tell you I won't have it! You can eat that beast raw or not eat at all!" came in Jesse James' voice. "That light can be seen on the water and you heard the signal, didn't you? When Unitah lets out a screech like that it means that I am being followed!"

"Where the deuce is this gal?"

"On the hills, of course! She'll be at the pass, that is, if I need her. Get that stuff down quick, for we've got to be going!"

"What's ther hurry, Jess? We've got till daylight! Thet thar freight on the Missouri Pacific don't pass ther cut till ten, and it's only an easy ride from hyar."

"That's got nothing to do with the case," broke in the bandit king, gruffly. "There will be three members of the gang waiting for me at the diggin's with news from Frank, so I'm going on as fast as I can. Then who knows what may happen at the pass! I've got enemies in Colorado, Hank, both live ones and dead ones."

"But I'm ez tired ez er dog an' I'm cussed ef I can move a step from this hyar spot till I've rested er little. Can't the news from Frank wait? Thar can't no one git ther dust 'cept ther one it's shipped to, an' bein' thet thet thar's you, Jess, thar ain't no danger of it's strayin'."

"No, it can't wait. Come on!" roared the outlaw, apparently getting tired of the harangue.

"I reck'n I've got ter go ef you say so, Jess; but you er hard master nowadays, an' I'm er gettin' sick of it all! What is ther in it fer me, I'd like ter know? I ain't had er ounce er dust fer a fortnight."

"There'll be dust enough when we get Frank out of his hole, and you know the oath of the James gang—once in it there's no quittin'. You've got to do as I say, whether you like it or not, and just now your play is to get a move on and fetch the horses. They've had a half-hour's rest, and that ought to do them!"

"My blood be on yer head, Jess, ef them sleuths is outside," growled Hank, as he splashed one foot in the water.

"Ah! Those fellows were winged, both of 'em. I plugged 'em myself, and, as for the third, you saw him roasting, didn't you?"

"Erlong with ther old woman, yes, I did, Jess," said the other, savagely. "An' I swore right thet thar second I'd be even with yer, Jess! Thet's how I come ter trip over yer, if yer remember! I 'lowed yer pistol would fly up and——"

Crack!

The outlaw had heard enough, and Hank Watrous gave a howl of terror. He had been reckless in daring the outlaw's wrath, but he did not believe that Jess would shoot him.

As his body fell heavily in the water it splashed the bank for some distance, but after the last ripple had died out there was not a sound or movement.

Harvey raised his head from the ground and listened



intently, at the same time drawing a revolver, which he had secured, from his belt and placing one finger on the trigger.

He fully expected to hear Jesse James leave his hiding-place under the rock in a minute, and, taking his cue from that first splash, he kept his glance riveted upon the water.

A minute later there was a movement at his side, and Pete dropped from beside him, putting his lips close to his ear and whispering a word of caution:

"Thar's some one in ther brook er rod erbove hyar, I reck'n! It's too cussed dark ter fire, an' I 'lowed I'd best not halt 'em!"

Harvey sprang to his feet with a growl of disgust.

"By thunder! Then I've lost him! He's gone the other way!" he cried, as he dashed back to the path and then tried to find a spot where he could get a glimpse of the stream.

"That was Jess himself! He was hiding under that ledge of rock! Quick, Pete! His horse is somewhere near here in the bushes!"

He dashed into the thick growth of bushes as he spoke, and, choosing the spot which seemed the thinnest, he broke through and waded out into the shallow stream.

Directly under the overhanging ledge of rock he stumbled over Hank's dead body, which was lying face upward in about a foot of water.

He did not wait to examine the cave under the rocks, for the outlaw had already got a good start of him, and he could make but slow progress walking in the water.

That Jess was trying to hide his tracks from whoever might follow was evident by his choosing this route, and, as the detective followed him in the watery trail, he began to wonder what would be the end of his reckless venture.

The banks on either side were so thickly wooded that the outlaw could have halted at any point and calmly awaited his excellent opportunity to put a bullet through his pursuer; but, as nothing of the sort happened, Harvey began to think that Jess had his own reasons for hurrying on and was content to bide his time in dealing with his enemies.

Suddenly, without a minute's warning, the treacherous stream deepened, the water rising to his knees and reaching his waist a minute later.

He floundered on, finding a firm footing after five

minutes of vigorous work, and then plunged into another pool, which made him strike out with might and main and swim for several minutes in what looked to be a placid basin.

"There's something wrong here! The fellow has tricked me!" he muttered, as he finally reached a spot where the water widened out several feet and the shadows from the bushes made it look like a pool of ink.

The low gurgle of the small mountain cataract came to his ears, and then, before he had fully located the sound, the swish and roar of miniature rapids reached him from another direction.

To leave the stream at this point would mean to plunge into an almost impenetrable forest, while to go on was to face dangers he was ill prepared to meet; so there was only one course to pursue, and that was to return to the overhanging rock and try to join his party.

He hated to do it, but there seemed nothing else, and, as he stood waist high in the water, he raised his revolver above his head and fired it twice as a signal.

Instantly two shots were fired from a weapon not far away, but the marksman was ahead, and not behind him.

"It's Jess, curse him!" he muttered, under his breath. "He's trying to lure me on! There are rapids, or falls, or something ahead there, but if he can go over them, so can I."

He tucked his weapon into the bosom of his shirt, for the water was again creeping above his belt, and once more began shoving his feet carefully over the treacherous sand of the brook's bottom.

A desire to meet the outlaw again face to face had taken possession of him, and he pushed on boldly.

"Nothing risked, nothing gained," he muttered, with desperate resolve. "I'll kill that scoundrel or he shall kill me!"

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## CHAPTER V.

### IN THE OUTLAW'S CLUTCHES.

"Go right ahead, stranger! So you thought you could track me through the water, did you? There's something to show you how easily I could kill you if I wanted to!"

These words, in Jesse James' cruelest voice, were called out to Harvey just as he reached a point in the



brook where he could go no further, and to his consternation the bullet that accompanied them came from behind and not ahead of him.

Harvey shut his teeth firmly and tried to locate the voice which he finally decided came from the branches of a tree, the highest one on either bank of the Ripple Creek brook that he had passed so far.

Jesse James had allowed him to pass him unmolested, but it was very easy to see his motive in doing so, for the roar of the falls showed that they were not a hundred yards away and the current was already sucking him slowly in that direction.

When he realized this he forgot everything else and striking out for the shore, tried his best to gain a footing.

Another bullet skimmed across the water within an inch of his head, and, although the stream was not deep at that point, the suction was so great that he could not make much headway.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the outlaw, again, "you've got nerve all right! I reckon you're one of those whelps that escaped me up yonder at the shanty! Hank Watrous, curse the traitor, knocked my arm when I shot, but he's gone to his last account, the same as all of my enemies do, first and last. Hello! you've succeeded in getting a foothold, have you?"

The question was followed by a great crackling of bushes and Harvey, who had really just managed to find the firm sand of the bank, made a desperate attempt to gain *terra firma* before the outlaw reached him.

"He must have eyes like an owl's," he muttered, as he made a grab for a bush that hung out over the water and tried to draw himself under cover.

Thud!

The heavy blade of a knife struck the branch that he had hold of, and, with a piece of bush in his hand, the detective toppled over backward.

He was on his feet in a second, and once more making for the bank.

This time as he grasped for a bush he drew his revolver and a bullet went speeding in the direction of the skulking outlaw.

A yell of pain was followed by a volley of curses, then something dropped around his shoulders and was

drawn tight with a jerk, and the next minute he was grabbed by the outlaw and lifted bodily over the bushes.

What happened for the next five minutes he hardly knew, except that his face and hands were scratched by twigs and brambles, and the lariat of vines that encircled his body, binding his arms close to his sides, seemed to cut deeper and deeper with every movement.

"There, you whelp! Now I'll have a look at you, and enjoy my revenge!" roared the outlaw as he finally dropped his burden on the ground under an oak that covered a clearing with its broad branches.

Drawing a match from his pocket he lighted a piece of dry wood, and, standing it where it would throw its rays upon his victim, he proceeded to examine him.

"So you're the chap that brought the letter from Frank," he said, after pulling the lariat a little tighter and examining the detective's features. "Well, that's the first point I've got to settle with you, and we'll begin with that first; the others will keep until later."

He seated himself by Harvey as he spoke, laying a cocked revolver on his knee, then taking a handkerchief from his pocket, he bound up a wound in his arm where the detective's bullet had grazed him.

Harvey shut his lips, and did not reply, and, after a second, the outlaw relieved him of his weapons.

"It ain't often I get a chance to spend a little time chatting with a detective," remarked the outlaw, with a cruel smile. "I'm usually in a hurry, but that don't happen to be the case to-night. I'm not hankerin' to make the Live Injun Pass before daylight, and it lacks an hour of that, I reckon."

"What's the matter with the pass?" asked Harvey.

"That's not here nor there. If you've got any explanations to make, go ahead and make them!"

Harvey braced himself up as well as his bonds would let him, and, looking his captor squarely in the face, he lowered his voice mysteriously.

"I reckon it's all right for you to kill me, Jess," he said, slowly. "I'm a superstitious cuss, and I knew my time had come to cash in my checks! Something I saw back there by the cave was——"

The outlaw jumped to his feet, and broke in without giving Harvey time to complete his sentence.

"What's that? You don't mean that you saw a



ghost, do you? An old fellow with long hair and a rope dangling around his neck——"

"I reckon I did see that same thing," said Harvey, stolidly. "It give me such a turn that I slid from the saddle, and the next instant the old man let out a yell that made my blood run cold, and what did my mustang do but turn tail and bolt like a skyrocket!"

He sat up a little straighter as he spoke, and tried to study the outlaw's face, but the torch had nearly burned out, so he could not see it distinctly.

"That was about three-quarters of an hour ago, wasn't it?" asked Jesse James, after a minute. "Then that means that it is roaming the hills, and if I had gone straight ahead, I might have dodged him."

The words were spoken with a deliberateness that made Harvey tremble for the success of his ruse, and as the outlaw broke off another dry bough from one of the largest bushes and stripped it of leaves preparatory to lighting it he watched him anxiously.

At that second there was a tremendous crash in the bushes, followed by a fiendish yell, and Jesse James found himself pinioned by something that resembled a human tiger.

He shook himself free like a flash, and attempted to pull the trigger of his weapon, but a blow on his wrist sent the bullet whizzing through the darkness in another direction. Then came another hand-to-hand struggle, which Harvey could not witness, for some one had come between him and the contestants, and he could feel a knife hacking at the vines that bound him.

Two more forms crashed through the bushes and into the clearing, but by this time the outlaw had succeeded in drawing another weapon, and as his first assailant went down with a knife sticking in his heart, two unerring bullets struck the newcomers and disabled them.

Then with the quickness of a deer the outlaw made a dash through the bushes, evidently thinking that there might be more to follow, and Harvey, jerking a pistol from the belt of one of his rescuers, darted after him, pulling hard at the trigger, but without firing a bullet.

At the water's edge he stood still and listened a minute, crouching behind a stunted tree so that he would not be a target for the outlaw's bullets.

Suddenly a dark object shot across the stream sev-

eral yards away, and a man's head appeared in the center of it.

"A canoe, by thunder! And Jess is in it!" he yelled, excitedly. "Why the devil don't this thing work, I wonder?"

He fingered the weapon carefully, finding every chamber empty, and as he groaned with rage, the canoe was lost in the darkness.

Jesse James had gone over the falls in his fragile craft, leaving the detective bemoaning his lack of knowledge of the country and wondering where would be the proper place to look for the outlaw's body.

Five minutes later he was back under the oak tree, finding the torch still burning and his three recent companions sitting glumly around the dead body of an old man whose features were not unfamiliar.

"Thank God we were on time! We had the devil's own time getting here," began Marcy, who was nursing a bullet wound in his ankle.

"Who is this?" asked Harvey, taking a sharp look at the dead man.

"It's Uncle Ajax! Yes; reckon, I told you he hated Jess," exclaimed Pete. "Waal, he had heerd Jess was comin', an' he was out on er still hunt fer ther robber! We run afoul of him not five minutes after yer took ter ther stream; an' when I told him Jess was ahead thar wasn't no stoppin' him, so we jest got ther critters tergether an' started after yer!"

"This is the one I owe you," laughed Harvey, as he lit another torch. "The next on our list to be rescued is Marcy."

Marcy was cutting another torch as he spoke, and as he applied a match, he said:

"Well, boys, it's almost daylight, and we must take this old fellow's body back to the pass. The old chap told me coming along that he had a daughter, and he made me promise that if anything happened to him that we fellows would protect her. She's got relatives in St. Louis, I believe; but you can bet I wouldn't have promised if I had expected for a minute that the old duffer's career was about to close——"

"But, having promised, of course you'll stick to it, old man!" broke in Star; "and, of course, we'll help you to ship the girl East. I only hope she'll take our news bravely!"



"I was thinking that suppose Jess should reach the pass first," continued Marcy. "He recognized the old man, no doubt, and knows that he is dead! It might be like him to vent his spite on his daughter."

"Come on, then, boys!" cried Harvey, springing to his feet. "We'll leave the old man here, for the present, anyway, while we hurry to the pass!"

Quickly they made their way through the bushes to where their horses had been left standing in the stream several rods behind.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE OUTLAW IN DENVER.

The sun was high in the east when the little party reached the pass, which was a narrow gorge between two hills leading out to the open prairie.

A rough log cabin stood at the mouth of the pass, but there was not a sign of life visible as the horsemen approached it.

Harvey galloped ahead, and as he reached the door he yelled back over his shoulder:

"Hurry, boys! The rascal has been here, and the girl is gone! There's been bloodshed here. Even the ground is spattered with it!"

"Then he has murdered her!" yelled Star, coming up at a hot pace. "Curse him! I thought he had the name of sparing the women!"

"Hold on, boys! It ain't human blood! Look hyar!" cried Pete, who had dismounted and entered the cabin.

The others rushed in after him and found the carcasses of two bloodhounds that had fairly been hacked to death with knives in the hands of some monster.

"Perhaps they were killed in defending their mistress!" cried Harvey; then he left the cabin and started on a tour of investigation which took him around behind the building.

Following some fresh footprints, he reached the rear of the building, which stood in a grove of stunted trees, and then, finding his way blocked by a low shed, he mounted to the roof and ran lightly across it.

A sharp yell springing from his lips brought Pete and Marcy to his side, and then all three stood and looked down upon the body of a man that was hanging by the neck from the roof of the low building.

"Who is it?" asked Marcy, as he whipped out his knife and cut the rope where it was looped around the log.

The three got down on the other side and examined the corpse, which was that of a young man who seemed to be a stranger in that section.

"I reckon now he's er tenderfoot, bein' ez how I don't know him," said Pete, after a brief inspection.

"No, he ain't. He's a detective!" cried Marcy, sharply. "See here!"

He held up a paper as he spoke, which had apparently been pinned to the body, and turned it around so that his companions could see what was on it.

Sent to eternity by Jesse James! Let other detectives beware!

Harvey read the words aloud.

No one said a word for a moment.

Then the noise of hoofbeats and a shout from Star reached them at the same time, so they hastily remounted the shed and went back to the front of the cabin.

A group of twelve horsemen were just pulling up before the door, and in a second the detectives found themselves covered by a dozen vicious-looking weapons.

Then the leader of the party happened to catch sight of Pete, and prompt explanations on both sides were forthcoming.

"We're after Jesse James! They say he's been hyar! I'm the sheriff, and these are my men! What's happened, Pete? How came you in this section?"

Pete talked fast, and five minutes later the sheriff was scouring the premises; but there was nothing more to be found than had already been discovered.

The notorious outlaw had come and gone, leaving the mark of his bloody hand behind him, as usual; but, now that their party was so well reinforced, the detectives felt more hopeful of capturing the bandit.

A delay of several hours was necessary to refresh the men, and then the posse started for the cut in the rocks which Jesse James had mentioned as the place where he hoped to board a freight train which would take him, if luck favored him, some distance toward Denver.

Who the unfortunate detective was who had met death at the outlaw's hands the Pinkerton men could not guess; but, as he was not from their agency, they gave him little thought; but he was properly buried before they continued their journey.

"The poor devil was on our lay, no doubt," Star re-



marked, soberly. "He was looking for Jess in the hope of corraling that ten thousand, and, like many another good man, he fell a victim to the robber! Now, the question to me is, what can Jess want with the girl? If she was a rich man's daughter, the case would be different; but there's no one at the Lone Injun to offer a ransom for her!"

"Thar's no accountin' fer some of thet thar villain's doin's," was the sheriff's answer. "I reckon now Jess knows what he's erbout! He's stole ther gal for some reason or other!"

But what it was no one could guess, and it remained for subsequent events to explain the mystery.

The abduction of the girl only added zest to the search for the bandit.

From the very door of the shanty the sheriff was able to trace the hoofprints of the outlaw's party, and as they rode on, watching the tracks carefully, they made several discoveries that filled them with consternation.

"These hyar tracks shows thet Jess was joined by his gang," said Pete, as they all halted at a crossroad. "I reckon now he didn't hev ter go ter ther Diggin's arter all! It looks ez if his crew was er waitin' fer him hyar!"

"It's the best organized gang in the country if that's the case," said Marcy. "Who the deuce could tell what time Jess would pass this spot? Why, he came within an ace of never passing it!"

"I reckon they don't count on no sech calamity ez thet thar," remarked the sheriff, grimly. "Jess hez spies all over; he hez ter hev, or we'd nab him! Now, I reckon thet this partickelar spy is er woman!"

As he spoke he pointed to a hoofprint that turned off in the direction of the small settlement of miners known as the "Diggin's," and as the glances of the others followed his they saw a bit of white cloth fluttering on a bush beside the roadway.

"A girl's handkerchief, by Jove!" cried Marcy, as he secured it. "Now, what do you bet it ain't that half breed, Unitah!"

"She's no Injun! She's a white gal thet was brung up by ther squaws," explained the sheriff, as he took another look at the tracks. "I saw her scurrying through ther Diggin's at daybreak this very mornin'! So she's one of thet thar robber's spies, is she! Waal, I've heerd as much afore, but I never believed it!"

"I wish we could catch that girl!" muttered Marcy,

savagely. "She's a cross between a catamount and a she-devil, if I'm not mistaken; and yet, Star, here, had the bad taste to fall in love with her!"

Star laughed with the rest, but his face crimsoned a little, for, in spite of her treachery, he was still interested in Unitah.

"We may's well make straight fer ther cut, then," began the sheriff. "We'd be wastin' time ter go to ther Diggin's ef Jess ain't thar——"

"And we'll be wastin' time ter go to ther cut," yelled one of the men who had ridden ahead a little distance. "There's smoke on ther horizon, which means it's ther freight train! We can't make ther cut now, and ther robber has escaped us!"

"We can try fer it!" yelled the sheriff, putting spurs to his horse. "Them trains jest crawl through ther mountains, particklarly ther long ones! Come on, ther hull lot on yer! I 'low we kin do it!"

He set the pace and the others followed, and in five minutes the cloud of black smoke came near enough to form an incentive for speed, after which the race to the cut was begun in earnest.

"Done, by thunder!" yelled Marcy, as he dropped from his horse twenty feet from the track, just far enough behind the first car not to be able to see the engine.

"Stop! Hold on! Halt!" bawled Harvey, tearing ahead and waving his arms excitedly as he went; but there was no defiant shriek from the engine, and the long train proceeded.

"Hanged if I don't think they take us for Jesse James himself!" roared the sheriff, as a brakeman between two cars suddenly drew a revolver and fired at him.

"They think we're trying to hold them up!" cried Star. "Thunder! How many cars are there? I've counted twenty already!"

"Whoop! Twenty-seven, and Jesse James is on top of the last!" yelled Harvey, excitedly. "Look at him, boys! He's lying as flat as a flounder! Pepper him! All at once! There! Take that, you sinner!"

As he spoke a perfect volley of bullets poured from the weapons of the posse, some striking the car and others whistling over it; and at the same moment there was another shriek of the engine, and the speed was slackened.

"Hurrah! They've stopped at last! Now we've got him!" yelled Harvey.



There was a flash of light and a puff of smoke from the roof of the last car as he spoke, and, as a pistol cracked, his own weapon was knocked out of his fingers.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Three shots followed the first one in rapid succession, and the outlaw, whose head had been shielded by his own saddle, which he had taken upon the car with him, suddenly sprang to his feet and drew another revolver.

For fully a second he stood erect, a splendid target for every weapon in the crowd; then, as he emptied one revolver and drew another, the trainmen suddenly seemed to become aware of their own responsibility in the matter.

Not one of the lot knew that the outlaw was on the car, as those who saw him took him for a tramp who was stealing a ride across the country, and they now turned every available weapon on the train deliberately upon the posse.

The sheriff and his men yelled explanations in vain, and, in a second, Jesse James, seeing his opportunity, bounded across the roofs, jumping from car to car, until, like a flash of lightning, he had gained the engine.

A pause of a second at the tender gave him a bead on the engineer and fireman, who were leaning from the cab, and, as he crossed the side rail of the locomotives like a cat, the two dead trainmen pitched headlong down to the roadbed.

A minute later, the outlaw's hand was on the throttle, and, giving a defiant shriek, the engine bounded ahead, leaving the twenty-seven cars stalled upon the prairie, with the trainmen and sheriff's posse still in a hot altercation.

"Well, I'll be blamed!" was the conductor's comment, when he finally understood what had happened. Then, as nothing could be done toward capturing the outlaw, all hands turned their attention to the dead and injured.

"Cussed if he didn't uncouple the tender himself!" roared the sheriff, shaking his fist after the retreating engine.

"I'd have shot him sure, if it hadn't been for that pesky brakeman putting a bullet into my arm," growled one of the men. "I had a dandy bead on him when he run across the engine!"

"This means no end of trouble for me," said the con-

ductor, grimly. "If you had only told me the cuss was aboard!"

"Great snakes! As if we didn't tell ye as plain as our pistols could talk!" growled the sheriff, angrily. "Now, thet thar robber has got ther laugh on me, as well as on every other sheriff in Colorado! I reckon he's half-way ter Denver by this time, at there rate he was goin'!"

He looked eagerly down the track, where nothing could be seen now but a cloud of smoke that was rapidly disappearing, and then shook his head as if the disgrace was almost too much for him.

The disappointment of the three detectives was intense; but there was nothing left for them to do but move on toward Denver, so, after another consultation, they started off, leaving Pete Spencer to go back with the sheriff's posse.

The trainmen tapped a telegraph wire that ran along above the track, and sent a message for assistance to the nearest station.

"Higgins will drop dead when he reads it," said the conductor, grimly. "I had ter tell him we'd been held up by a sheriff's posse, and that Jess James had run off with ther engine!"

The sheriff led his men back to the Diggings as soon as they were able to go, and, although he had lost Jesse James, he was made happy by catching one of the James gang a day later, and this fact gave him a distinction which he craved among the other sheriffs of Colorado.

Meanwhile, the detectives were forced to spend several hours in the saddle before another train passed on the Missouri Pacific, and they were enabled to pursue their journey after the famous outlaw.

At every station east of Denver people were talking of Jesse James' last escapade, which they had heard of indirectly; but the three detectives had nothing to say, for fear of betraying their errand, and their first duty at Denver was to procure disguises, after which they scoured the city in search of news of the bandit.

Frank James was still at St. Louis unable to get away.

What the outlaw's next move would be they did not know, but it was safe to guess that he would try to rescue his brother and find a way to get into his possession Frank's rich haul in St. Louis.

There was no use in guessing how both would be accomplished, but they had seen enough of the outlaw's



prowess now to feel sure that he would do it, unless they were clever enough to learn his plans and outwit him.

To this end they bent all their energies, and were soon in communication with the authorities at St. Louis, but forty-eight hours elapsed before a clew was forthcoming that told them accurately of the outlaw's movements.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE DETECTIVES IN CLOSE QUARTERS.

At five minutes past twelve of the third night of their stay in Denver, Harvey and Star made a tour of some of the worst streets in the city.

They were holding a low conversation when Star suddenly put his hand on his friend's arm and the next second, without a word, they both darted into a hallway.

A moment later three men passed them in the darkness, and after they were far enough away for safety, the two detectives shadowed them.

"Tracked at last, by Jove!" muttered Star, delightedly. "That's Dead Shot Bill on the right, and Bink Barrows in the middle. Who is the other fellow?"

"Exactly what we must find out! The other two are certainly members of the James gang, so it stands to reason that the third is a rascal of some sort."

"They are making straight for Murphy's! I wish Marcy was here!" said Star again. "It will take two of us to trail that trio, and we need a third to——"

"Hello! They are going to separate! That means that you and I part company here," broke in Harvey, softly. "I'll follow the two cutthroats while you shadow the suspect! Good luck, old man! I'll see you later!"

Harvey moved away from his friend, and, quickening his pace, was soon on the track of the two members of the James gang, whose faces and forms they had seen in the Rogues' Gallery at Chicago.

At the next corner these two rascals were joined by a third man, and as Harvey got a look at him under a gaslamp he gave a gasp of wonder.

"Tanner, of the city detective bureau, as true as I live!" he muttered. "There's treachery there all right! No wonder the city can't get information of Jesse James or his pals! The rascals have found a friend at headquarters!"

Slipping his badge into his pocket, and altering his

appearance a little, the detective slowed up and waited until the three men disappeared behind the swinging door of a miserable saloon which was known to be a rendezvous for the worst characters in Denver.

As he was creeping up to the door to listen a minute before going in, some one touched his arm, and turning, he saw Marcy.

"Hello, old man!" said Marcy. "Just in time, I see! I just met Star, and who do you suppose he's after? No one less than an express messenger from the Union Pacific! He told me the fellow had just left Dead Shot Bill——"

"And I'm just going to join him," answered Harvey, sharply. "Stay outside till I whistle, old man! One at a time won't look so suspicious!"

"Go easy! There's some one spying!" whispered Marcy, catching a glimpse of a dark shadow near the door.

Harvey pulled an old silver watch out of his pocket and looked at it, saying in a careless voice:

"Come inside, Pat! Faith, it's Murphy as sells the sthuff ter mak' yer schlape foine! A snifter av whisky will do yez good, and we'll be afther gettin' home thin before one in the mawnin'!"

"Yez can go by yerself, Hennessey," was the prompt answer, as Marcy lurched off across the street. "Sure it's not Murphy's vile sthuff that I do be after wantin'!"

Harvey promptly assumed a half-drunken gait, and reeled up to the door, but as he had expected the man on guard had vanished.

Whether he had been deceived by them or not, he could not tell, but there was nothing to do except take the chances.

He opened the door boldly, and staggered in while Marcy walked half-way up the block and then turned back as though he had changed his mind about taking the "snifter."

As he reached the building, which was a ramshackle affair, consisting of only two stories, he was just in time to hear Harvey whistle.

Without a second thought he dashed into the place, finding himself in a narrow entryway.

Opening a door at the further end, he stopped abruptly upon the threshold, and, in spite of his long experience in strange sights, a whistle escaped him.



No less than twenty men were in the room, five of whom wore masks, while at least seven more were disguised one way or another.

"The James gang, by Jove!" was the exclamation that rose to his lips, but it was cut short by his receiving a push in the middle of the back which sent him spinning across the barroom.

"Ha! ha! Now bolt the door, Humpy, and lower the lights!" ordered a voice that he recognized at once as belonging to Jesse James. "That's another of the cursed sneaks! We've bagged a fine brace of 'em! Now, then, to business, men! It isn't safe for us to lag, not even at Murphy's!"

"That's right, Jess! The police may get wind of ye at any minute!" replied a burly specimen, who had grabbed Marcy as he was reeling across the room, and deftly relieved him of his weapons.

"Cussed if they ain't the two chaps I left behind me at Ripple Creek," remarked Jesse James again, as he took a closer look at his two victims. "They're Pinkerton sleuths, curse them, and nervy fellows, too! If they weren't, they wouldn't be in Denver this minute!"

"No, we'd be waiting for you to come back with that engine, Jess!" spoke up Harvey, who was also weaponless and surrounded by the outlaws.

"Ha! A clever move, that! One of the best I ever made!" shouted the outlaw king, jovially. "I run that cursed engine off a trestle, though! It was the closest call I ever had, but I'm here to tell the story! Now, then, which of you was it that brought me the letter from Frank? I've got a score to settle with him, and I'll take time to settle it now, by thunder!"

"Be quick about it, cap'n! Things is mighty onsartin' outside," warned one of the masked men. "There's work to be done if we leave Denver to-night, and it's ten to one the police won't let us do it!"

"Curse the police! I'll wipe out my score with this whelp here and now," roared the outlaw, who was a good deal the worse for drink. "I'll carve his carcass into bits, the sneaking liar! So you've followed me all the way across Colorado, have you?"

The question was addressed to Harvey, for the keen eyes of the outlaw had recognized him at last, and before the detective could reply a hand that felt as heavy as iron was laid on his shoulder.

"Let's have no frin'!" urged Murphy, anxiously.

"Use yer knife, Jess! Musn't make no noise fer ther police ter hear," suggested one of the men.

Marcy was near enough to see the outlaw whip a knife out of his belt, and, making a quick spring forward, the detective planted his fist in his eye with so much force that Jesse James reeled backward and would have fallen had not one of his men caught him.

Just then a revolver slipped from one of the cut-throats' belt, and, striking squarely on the hammer, exploded it with a noise like a cannon.

The report seemed to fill them all with frenzy, and there was a grab for the detectives, who were quickly overpowered.

While this was going on Murphy had edged toward the door and had given three sharp raps on the heavy panels. Harvey was now kicking like a mule, but, in a second, he had wit enough to call attention to the treacherous manœuvre of the rascally proprietor.

"Look out, Jess! Murphy's trying to sneak! He's afraid they might have heard that gun on the street, and——"

Jesse James turned like a flash and made a dive across the room, and, the next minute, Murphy lay on the floor of his own saloon, with a knife sticking in his vitals.

"Curse you, you hound! So you were trying to bolt, were you?" growled the outlaw, as he removed the knife and wiped the bloodstains from it with the Irishman's blue "jumper."

"Thar, he's done fer! Come, Jess, let's get out of hyar!" said a burly giant.

"Finish 'em up, boys! I must be going!" called the outlaw king, with a glance at the door. "There's a freight train in ten minutes that I can make if I try! You all know your work and where the next meeting-place is, and, when Frank's swag is safe, I'll see to it that the divvy is fair! I'm off to get the gal now, and then——"

A yell from the lookout just outside of the door cut short the sentence, and, as a squad of policemen came tramping up the street, every outlaw in the place made a rush for the rear windows.

Marcy was now free, and Harvey broke loose from the ruffian that he had been kicking and biting, and together they followed their villainous tormentors.

As they slid from the low windows the squad broke



to the saloon, finding no one but Murphy with the gaping wound in his breast.

Marcy pulled one hand loose by a tremendous effort, and then whipped out a penknife that the robbers had overlooked, and a minute later the two detectives were teeling out of the neighborhood with as stealthy movements as though they were members of the gang of cut-throats.

"Another trick for Jesse James!" growled Harvey, softly. "It begins to look as if we'd never catch him!"

"We stand as good a show as any one," was Marcy's answer; "but come on, old man, we must get our wits together! Jesse James leaves Denver on a freight train in less than ten minutes!"

They had been hurrying along as they talked, and were in a fairly well-lighted section of the city, and, a moment later, a closed carriage passed them going at a tremendous pace.

"Hello! what's up?" cried Harvey. "There's a rumour going on inside there! Whoop her up, old man! I'm sure we're in for something!"

"I've had about enough for one night," laughed Marcy, as he sprinted ahead; "but, of course, if there's trouble ahead I'm——"

"Help! help! Save me!" shrieked a woman's voice at that minute, the sound coming from behind the closed doors of the carriage.

"I told you so! It's a woman!" yelled Harvey.

They made another frantic dive ahead, and, at that instant, the vehicle stopped suddenly, and a man, whom they saw only for a second, dashed away in the darkness.

Harvey reached the carriage door in time to catch the occupant as she came tumbling out shrieking at the top of her lungs, and, as Marcy helped him carry her to the sidewalk, they both caught a glimpse of a third person in the carriage.

"Hello! it's the girl, Unitah!" cried Marcy. "Hold on there, driver! Don't let him go, old man! Ten to one we've got the girl that Jesse James stole——"

A burst of shrill laughter cut short his sentence, and Unitah stood up in the carriage and screamed an order to her driver.

The fellow would have refused if the click of a pistol hammer within a foot of his head had not acted as an inducement, and, whipping up his horses, he dashed

down the street, leaving Marcy shouting for the police, while a crowd of pedestrians were quickly gathering from all directions.

"It's the James gang! Use your wits now, old man!" warned Star, as he got his breath after carrying the girl bodily. "Give 'em some sort of a story, and let's get out of this, quick, old man! Our game is up if the police get onto us! They'll bag our bird and get all the honor, to say nothing of the hoodle!"

"That was Jess in the carriage! We've lost time!" growled Marcy, as half-a-dozen stragglers ran up as a sort of advance guard for the policeman.

Star put his arm around the girl, who was crying pitifully now, and, the next moment, Marcy had shouted orders to those who had gathered about.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE RESCUE.

"The girl was being kidnaped! Get after that carriage, some one!" he yelled. "Her abductor was Jesse James! It's lucky we happened along just as we did, or she'd have broken her neck when she pitched out of that old go-cart! Hello! Ain't there an officer in this town? I want to warn the city officials! If that was Jess, he'll loot the town and run away with everything that ain't nailed before anybody knows it! Come on, miss! There's a boarding-house near by! We'll see you in safe quarters! It's the least we can do for a lady! The city must look out for you to-morrow!"

He rattled off this speech, forcing his way through the small crowd as he talked, and Star hurried after him, half dragging the young woman.

"Hold on, thar! Not so fast young feller!" roared a coarse voice, and a big, hulking fellow in a slouch hat edged his way close to the detectives.

"You're a cool hand, all right! I 'low yer think yer runnin' this hyar town now, don't yer? How do we know yer ain't stealin' ther gal yerself? I reck'n now thar ain't no one hyar thet seen any kerridge!"

A growl of assent from the crowd showed that they approved of these sentiments, but the detectives kept moving forward while Marcy talked coolly.

"Nonsense! What the deuce do we two drummers want of the girl? Why, she's as wild as a hawk! I'd



be willing to bet now she ain't been in civilization fifteen minutes!"

"And she's half scared to death!" broke in Star. "Get out of the way, my friend! Can't you see that you're only making her worse with your staring!"

"Where the deuce is the officer on this beat, anyhow! We might as well be on the prairie," went on Marcy, angrily. "This is my first visit to Denver, and I hope it will be the last. The place is rotten!"

"It is, hey! Reckon yer a tenderfoot what don't know er live town when yer see it!" roared the coarse voice again, and the burly fellow with the slouch hat tried to wedge himself in between the two detectives. "Wall, I rck'n now we'll show yer what kind of er town this hyar is! Yer kin let go of thet thar gal, an' be cussed quick erbout it!"

"That's right! Ther chap is doin' this hyar job too high-handed!" growled another voice, and a second burly form forced itself through the crowd up close to the two detectives.

"I reckon now, stranger, ther gal hed best be 'lowed ter say whether she's been stole or not! We're a peace-lovin' city, an' kidnapers don't get off none too easy, not when we ketch 'em red-handed, an' this hyer seems ter be erbout what's happenin', in my opinion!"

The movements of the two were so threatening that Marcy crowded closer to the girl, who was shaking like a leaf, and turning, he faced the last speaker squarely.

"So you're a native of Denver, are you?" he asked, in a loud tone. "I wouldn't have believed it by your accent, stranger! Here, officer! I want a word with you!" he added, as he caught a glimpse of a bluecoat hovering on the edge of the crowd. "I want you to help me take this young lady to a place of safety!"

There was a quick movement of the two burly forms and the police officer was hidden from view, and at that minute the girl found her voice again, and uttered another cry of terror.

"You come erlong with us, an' we'll take keer of you!" said one of the two men, putting his hand on the girl's shoulder.

Star struck out straight from the shoulder, and the fellow staggered back, and an uppercut from the detective's left hand sent him reeling toward the gutter.

"Curse you! Keep your hands off!" roared Star,

just as Marcy caught a blow that was aimed by the other fellow at his head, and retaliated with a tremendous punch in the pit of the ruffian's stomach.

The crowd vanished like magic when it saw a fight was in progress, and leaving the two meddlers lying on the sidewalk the detectives rushed the girl around the corner of the street just as the officer, who was half-way down the block, rapped loudly for assistance.

"Whew! That was hot work, but it's over for the present," muttered Star, as they half dragged the girl into the vestibule of a house and closed the outer door just in time to prevent the minions of the law and small crowd of hoodlums from seeing where they went.

An hour later they had the girl housed safely for the night, and the next day a plan of action was decided on in which she figured conspicuously.

Before the city was fully awake to the fact that the famous outlaw was there, the detectives got a clew that he had started toward St. Louis, and they were soon hot upon his heels once more, only now they had an addition to their number.

"Those two fellows that we ran up against last night on the street belonged to the Jesse James gang, an' I'll bet on it," Star remarked, as he took a seat beside Harvey in the smoker of an express train over the Union Pacific the next evening.

The car was dimly lighted, and as he spoke two more passengers entered, both dressed in tweed suits and derby hats, and looking like the average "drummer."

Star looked up quickly, and there was a twinkle in his eyes, but he could not betray his thoughts so much as by a smile, although he was dying to tell the fourth member of their party how well she looked in masculine clothing.

"Makes a stunning looking fellow, and carries it off well, too, doesn't she?" muttered Harvey, under his breath, as the two newcomers dropped into the seats ahead of them, and gave them a cool stare.

"She's a brick! Smart as a steel trap, and pretty too!" was the answer, as Star offered a match to his companion.

"Got over her scare, and was ready for business in ten minutes."



Harvey let his eyes wander indifferently over the car and then glanced out of the window, but it was too dark to see anything.

"Fastest train over the road," he said, in a distinct voice; then, lowering it quickly, he added: "It's safe enough, I guess. Still, there'll be no harm in keeping our wits about us. Jess is ahead of us all right, and that's cause enough for anxiety. Still, if there's anything on the train worth stealing——"

"But there is! Look ahead there! In the express compartment, I mean! I've seen that fellow looking at his pistol a dozen times in the last ten minutes! Hold him till she steadies a little, and you can see him through the window!"

Star glanced ahead, and caught a glimpse of the express messenger in the baggage car. He was standing in the door of the car peering out into the darkness.

After glancing at him a moment, Harvey gave a start, and, turning to his companion, whispered:

"That messenger is the fellow I shadowed the other night. He's in with the James gang, no doubt about it."

"It might have queered our deal," began Star, when the fourth member of their party suddenly leaned over and addressed him.

"You don't happen to have a pack of cards about you now, do you?" she asked, with a peculiar drawl. "If you have, we might have a little game—there's four of us, and——"

"Hang it, no! I forgot the cards! Hello! where the neuce is the coon?" exclaimed Star, instantly.

The girl bent nearer and lighted a cigarette at Star's cigar butt very cleverly, and, as she did so, she whispered a bit of information.

"Go easy! These men ain't so sleepy as they look! I'd wake 'em up if I was you, they're——"

"Mostly drummers, merchants and tenderfeet, like ourselves," laughed Star, as Marcy suddenly trod heavily on the heel of his foot. "It's a great country for prospecting and selling goods. What the natives won't buy they are glad to sell to you, so trade is bound to be good whichever way you look at it!"

Marcy had fished a pack of cards out of his pocket, and as he handed them over for the others to inspect, he had a chance to make a cautious observation.

"I've been through the whole train carefully, sleepers and all, and there's not a suspicious character aboard!"

In fact, two-thirds of the passengers are women and children."

"That means a peaceful journey at any rate! We'll leave the train at——"

"Sh! I'm going straight through to St. Louis!" broke in Harvey, who had noticed that a middle-aged man near them seemed to take a sudden interest in their conversation.

Marcy took the hint, and pulling a small case of sample suspenders from under the seat, he proceeded to display them.

"Ha! ha! Not much use for those things where I come from," began Star. "I've been prospecting around the Lone Injun Diggin's for a month, and a twine string was good enough for any one out there! Ever been to the Lone Injun, sir?" he asked, addressing the stranger.

"Reckon I have now," began the man; then he seemed to suddenly recollect something, for he straightened up stiffly and assumed a dignified manner.

"It's been a long time since I visited Colorado, though. Nine years, I think, and the country has changed some, they tell me," he said, brusquely.

"Well, it could change more and not hurt it much," laughed Star, leaving his companions and moving over toward the stranger. "The fact is, it's the worst country I ever was in! There isn't any telling what minute a man and his money will part company. You see, Jesse James and his gang are holding high jinks out here now, and——"

The stranger gave a jump from his seat, and half of the men in the car started.

"Great God! You don't mean that that robber is in this section, do you?" asked the man. "I've got a wife and child aboard, and a thousand dollars in my pocket!"

"Better swallow your wad! There won't any harm come to the women folks," laughed Star. "Jess is on the trail for dust just now, but it ain't at all likely he'll corral the train!"

The man began buttoning up his coat and vest, while several others did the same, and there was a general stealthy drawing of weapons from hip pockets and the click of a few hammers.

"By thunder! A bombshell couldn't make more commotion than the mention of that rascal's name, I reckon! Sorry I spoke it, if it's going to upset you all so!" went on the detective. "If I hadn't just come from the scene



of his operations, I wouldn't have thought of the robber, but the fact is Jess has just murdered an old man and stolen his daughter, and when I left the country, I promised the sheriff I'd let him know if I got wind of which way he went. I suppose now there hasn't one of you heard of the fellow's whereabouts, have you?"

He glanced around indifferently as he spoke, and a general shaking of heads followed, then a quietly-dressed man at the extreme end of the car calmly took a brace of fine pistols from his pocket and proceeded to load them.

"That looks as if he'd get a hot reception if he happened to drop in here," laughed Harvey, staring straight at the quiet man. "The handsomest pair of pops I ever saw, by Jove! Any objections to my taking a closer look at them, stranger?"

He rose as he spoke, and attempted to cross the car, and, as he did so, the glances of the other three members of his party followed him.

"It's the James gang, and that's Jess! I'll bet on it!" muttered a voice just behind Star's head, and the detective turned like a flash to find himself staring straight down the barrel of a pistol.

"Hold on! Let up, there! I'm no robber!" began Star, but there was a click of several more weapons, and a ringing order:

"Up with your hands the whole lot of you! What do you take us for, anyway? Of course, it's the James gang! Cover 'em, men!"

The speaker was the passenger who had taken such an interest in the batch of "drummers," and, as he spoke, every one of the detectives recognized the voice of Jesse James, and realized what a corner Star's words had driven them into.

"Throw up your hands! Another minute and you are dead men!" yelled the quiet man in the last seat, getting a bead on Star's heart.

"You thought I'd be fool enough to let you get the drop on me, didn't you? Well, I ain't such an ass as I look! Now, then, don't you dare move a muscle!"

"And I'll do the same!" roared the other passenger, who had unearthed another weapon, and now stood with one in both hands. "Now, then, men, if one of you will guard the door and look after the porter we'll just clear out this gang, and chuck them off the train!"

The detectives looked at each other, and then all three

looked at the girl, but her face was not whiter than the and her nerve had not deserted her.

Every man in the car had risen now, and Marcy, who had not spoken, had made a startling discovery.

There were nineteen men in the smoker, including their own party, and, while all of them were armed, six the number held weapons in both hands, and, strange enough, these weapons, besides covering the detectives were aimed at each other.

Further, a man armed with two weapons stood where he could guard each entrance to the car, and, at a signal from Jesse James, one of them jerked the bell rope suddenly.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE WRECK.

The train had struck the open prairie and was thundering along at a tremendous rate of speed, but in an instant the brakes were applied and she slowed down a little.

Another order fell from the outlaw's lips, and the two ends of the bell rope dangled down, while one of the ruffians slipped a knife back into his pocket.

"Now then, men, go through them, and spare no one," roared Jesse James, making a dive toward the forward end of the car.

A bedlam ensued that could not be described, for, in the second, the innocent passengers knew that they had been tricked by an organized gang of train robbers, and it was hard to tell friends from enemies.

As the numerous pistols began to crack, every one dodged for a place of safety.

Star threw himself before the girl, who was standing as she had been ordered, with her hands above her head, but he was only able to pull the trigger once, when he was relieved of his weapon and the cold muzzle of a revolver was pressed hard against his temple.

"Shoot that messenger—not Tom Banks, the other one!" roared the outlaw, again. "Here, Wilkes! You take care of the safe! I've got a little job to do ahead there in the engine!"

He had thrown open the door as he spoke, but turned and gave another order over his shoulder.

"Get through the train, Bill, and look after the men



here's only a handful of them. The rest are petti-  
coats!"

The next second he was scrambling over the roof of  
the express car, and a cracking of pistols, combined with  
the grinding of the brakes, was making the place a per-  
fect bedlam.

The men worked like fiends, and so rapidly that no  
one had more than a chance to think before three of the  
thunder had full possession of the car, holding fully a  
dozen passengers under cover of their weapons.

The attack had been executed when nearly every man  
on the train was in the smoker, and the trainmen, who  
could not get into the car because of the guard at the  
rear door, sprang off of the various platforms and ran  
ahead, their pistols popping resentfully, but doing no  
damage.

Jesse James put a bullet into the brain of both en-  
gineer and fireman simultaneously, and, climbing over  
the engine, he was quickly in the cab, where he stopped  
just long enough to adjust a mask over his face before he  
put his hand on the throttle.

A ten-minute run would bring him exactly where he  
wanted to be—a wild spot on the prairie where a dozen  
of his men awaited him, and where, with the passengers  
under control, he could take his own time in removing  
the money which he knew to be in the express com-  
pany's safe.

Crack! Crack! went the bullets of the trainmen and  
passengers, who were crowding close to the engine; but  
there was a hitch somewhere in the machinery that the  
outlaw did not understand, and, as a bullet whizzed by  
his ear, he turned angrily and began to empty his re-  
volvers at the men below him.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Shots flew in all directions, for one of the trainmen was  
on the roof of a car taking deliberate aim at the cab,  
while three desperadoes fired a volley from the platform  
of the express car.

Jesse James stepped to the door of the cab for a final  
fusillade just as one of the passengers nervily approached  
the engine.

"Don't you know me, Jess?" cried the dignified Frank

James, as he found himself covered by his brother's re-  
volver.

A cry of welcome fell from the outlaw's lips. In a  
second the next most notorious bandit in the world was  
in the cab beside him.

"Hello, Frank! Where the devil did you come  
from?" asked Jess, as the engine leaped ahead, leaving  
half-a-dozen wounded men lying beside the track.  
Turning, Jess grasped his brother's hand in a hearty  
clasp.

"From St. Louis, of course!" laughed his brother.  
"Speed her, Jess! There's another train over this track  
in fifteen minutes! I'm a merchant going to St. Louis  
on business! Ha! ha! No wonder you didn't know  
me! This is a great deal for us, old man! There's a  
cool two hundred thousand below there! You think I  
ought to be going the other way. I had to double on  
my track, as the sleuths were after me."

"How many did you leave behind you?"

"Two, and they're left for good! The police nabbed  
them!" chuckled Frank. "My disguise saved me; but,  
slow up, Jess! There's the signal!"

Sure enough, a lantern was being swung vigorously  
a little distance ahead, but as he caught the first glimpse  
of it, Jesse James let out a volley of curses.

"It's a red light, by thunder! Curse them! I told  
'em to swing a green one! There'll be one man less in  
the gang, I'm thinking, when I find out who has made  
that blunder!"

"Now the thing is to get the stuff out!" said Frank, as  
he watched the slowing down of the train, knowing that  
members of his own gang were acting as brakemen.

"Banks has fixed that! He's one of the messengers,"  
was the answer. "I bribed the fellow as soon as I heard  
that the stuff was going this way. He and Wilkes will  
put the stuff where we can get it when we want it!"

"Is the other messenger out of the way?"

"Yes. Dead as a doornail! Hello! What the devil  
is the matter?"

"Something wrong about the signal! The boys must  
be drunk!"

"Curse them! They'll get nothing to drink for a  
month to pay for it!"

"Look out, Jess!"

The outlaw put his head out of the window of the cab



and tried to peer through the darkness. There were two lanterns being waved now, and both looked like spots of fire in the distance, for the track was so level that they could see for miles ahead of them.

"We've got to stop! There's no going on!" said the outlaw, finally; but I'll swear I don't like the looks of that signal yonder!"

"I'll crawl back over the tender and see what's going on inside," said Frank, anxiously. "If there's nothing to fear down there, we can easily handle what's ahead of us!"

He opened the door of the cab as he spoke, and once more Jess touched the throttle and then let off a little more steam, bringing the train to a snail's pace some distance from the lanterns.

"That'll give the men time to guess that there's something coming," he muttered, as he hastily reloaded his weapons. "Now, then, I'm ready for you, whoever you are! Friend or foe, Jesse James fears neither!"

He leaned out of the window as he spoke, and, as the train crept on, he heard the sound of hoarse shouts, and saw beside the track the figures of a fair-sized band of horsemen.

"A posse of some kind, curse 'em! And I am trapped!" muttered the outlaw, as the glare of the headlight showed him their determined faces.

As quick as thought he applied full steam and gave a warning shriek, and, as the great engine thundered by the group of his supposed enemies, he thrust his masked face out of the cab window and yelled derisively:

"Better luck next time! If you want me, catch me, you pack of bloodhounds!"

A cry of horror was wafted to his ears, but he did not seem to hear it, and a second later the flash of the headlight showed him a break in the track not a train's length in front of the flying engine.

Then he realized, with the quickness of lightning, that the men he had just passed were neither friends nor foes, but a party of natives, who, knowing of the injured track, were doing their best to save the express from being wrecked. They did not even guess who was at the throttle, unless his own words in passing had enlightened them.

In vain he signaled "down brakes" and shut off steam instantly; by the very impetus of its past force the en-

gine reached the broken rails, and, as it fairly leaped into the air, the outlaw leaped out into the darkness.

There was a roar and a crash that echoed far across the prairie, but Jesse James never lost his nerve for a second, nor did he forget that there were two hundred thousand dollars—mostly his brother's stealings—now in his keeping.

He landed upon his feet in some low bushes that bordered the track, and, after running to a safe distance, turned deliberately and watched the piling up of the one on top of the other.

Then, pulling off his mask and clapping on a pair of false whiskers instead, he returned to the wreck, and, in less than five minutes, had every uninjured member of his gang about him.

"Quick, men! Unmask and disguise, or you'll be roughly handled! Turn to and drag out some of those poor devils yonder! Never mind the men, save the women and children!" he ordered, softly.

A few lightning changes followed, and the men began their work, Jesse James himself making a dozen heroic cues.

Banks, the express messenger, was dead, but his body for the gang had been faithfully executed, for the doors of the safe were open, and every compartment empty.

When the commotion was at its height, Jesse James gave another low order, and one by one the outlaws of the gang dropped out of sight and skulked away through the brush toward a fringe of stunted trees in the distance.

The night was excessively dark and the smoke, steam, and glare of the headlight tended to make it dark, so that friend and foe worked side by side without guessing the close proximity of each other.

"Curse that outlaw! Jesse James should be roasted in the boiler!" cried Star, as he gazed in horror upon the wreck.

The three detectives had not been able to recognize the robbers until just that minute, and Star's words ringing out like the blast of a bugle sent the last outlaws flying to cover.

"Curse him! He's wrecked the train in order to steal the safe!" groaned one of the passengers.

Some one picked him up as he spoke and gave him a drink of liquor from a pocket flask, and then Frank James, still looking like a mild merchant from civilization,



on, turned and assisted Star in carrying an injured man to a place of safety.

"Will no one ever put an end to that rascal?" groaned another man, who had a bullet hole in his arm and who had been heaping imprecations on the head of the notorious bandit.

Frank James was near enough to hear the remark and answered promptly:

"If the fellow was in the engine, he must be dead now! The tender is on top of it, and both are bottom upward."

"No such good news as that! I saw the fiend jump!" remarked Star, promptly. "They got away with the stuff all right, and are skulking somewhere in the vicinity! Hello! here comes help!"

The band of horsemen had reached the scene as he spoke, and he hurried toward them while Frank James stood a second, wondering what he had better do next—join his brother in the darkness or go on playing the rôle of merchant.

His reflections were interrupted by some one stumbling against him suddenly, and a voice that was not unfamiliar hissed something at him like a serpent.

"You are Frank James! I am sure of it! I saw you once, years ago, when you helped to hang my father! Move a muscle, and I will put a bullet in your heart! I'm the girl that you knew as Uncle Ajax's daughter!"

If a bomb had exploded in his pocket the outlaw could not have been more surprised, especially as the girl—as she called herself—wore a derby hat and trousers.

He made an effort to move, but the click of a pistol hammer restrained him, and he stood like a statue with the dead and injured lying about him, all speaking of the cruelty of his calling.

It was a strange position for a man like the outlaw to be in, but the girl's eyes snapped viciously, and, besides, she was holding an ugly weapon. One effort to run would only send him to perdition.

"There are three detectives on the train," she continued, calmly, "and they'll know what to do with you!"

In her excitement she turned her eyes away from the outlaw's face for the space of a second toward some figures who were approaching when, like a flash of lightning, a firm hand seized her wrist and she found herself

in a desperate hand-to-hand struggle with a man who was almost a giant in strength.

"Help! help! It's Frank James!" she shrieked, at the top of her lungs.

The outlaw dashed the revolver from her hand and broke from her grasp, but a second later he was felled by a blow from Star's fist and sent sprawling among the injured.

Five minutes later he was bound hand and foot, and carried into the last car, which had remained on the track, and here he was obliged to sit and see the injured as they were brought in, all cursing the man whose deed had brought them such suffering.

"Murder him!"

"Lynch him!"

"Kill him in cold blood!" shrieked a chorus of the sufferers.

These were some of the cries that greeted the outlaw, as he was borne into the car.

"Stop! Listen!" cried Marcy, suddenly, holding up one hand.

A tremendous shout outside of the car told them that something was going on, and Marcy threw up his hat with a yell of excitement.

"They've caught Jesse James himself!" he cried.

## CHAPTER X.

### IN AMBUSH.

The detective darted from the car, followed by all the other uninjured men who hoped to see his words realized, and a second later a rough-looking fellow who had been brought in groaning pitifully slipped to the side of Frank James and cut the bonds from his wrists and ankles.

"Cut loose and bolt fer ther timber yonder!" he whispered, cautiously. "I hung around on purpose ter see what they did to yer, Frank, so I hope yer won't fergit it when it comes ter ther divvy!"

"I won't fergit, Dave," was the answer, as Frank James made for the rear door of the car just as another shout showed him that they were bringing their prisoner in through the front one.

The trainmen and rescuers were too busy and too



excited to notice him as he dropped off of the platform, and, after crouching under the car for a minute, the outlaw darted from the track and was soon lost in the growth of scrub a half a mile from the scene of the disaster.

Marcy discovered his disappearance after he had helped bring in a burly giant wearing a black mask on his face, whom every one supposed to be the king of outlaws.

The next minute all was confusion.

The mask was torn off, and the man proved to be one of the outlaw gang who had exchanged clothes with Jesse James after he had escaped from the wrecked engine.

"It's er cussed shame! I reckoned now yer'd ketched ther two on 'em!" remarked the rascal who had freed Frank James, as soon as he could make himself heard above the racket.

Marcy gave him a quick look and discovered the handle of a knife sticking out of his pocket, and the next second a dozen men pounced upon him.

"He cut the fellow loose!" cried one of the injured passengers.

A rumble behind them on the track suddenly caught every ear.

"There's the relief train, thank God!" cried Star, from the door. "We'll send the dead and injured back to Denver, but the rest of us don't leave this spot until we have scoured every inch of prairie for that gang!"

"They're a dozen miles from here by now!" broke in another voice. "They've been met by other members of their gang and supplied with horses. The only thing we can do is to look for the money."

"The money be hanged! Catch Jesse James!" roared another voice.

Thus it went on, each cursing the outlaw, until the injured were all transported to the relief car and the crew of wreckers were at work trying to clear the tracks and prevent any further damage to the railroad company.

The three detectives held a short consultation just be-

fore the relief train departed, which resulted in the chase of four horses from the first group of rescuers who went back with the injured ones to Denver.

As they mounted, Star was heard to groan slightly but loud enough to instantly attract the attention of Harvey.

"The devil! You don't mean to say you were hurt," cried Harvey, quickly.

"It's only a bruise! I tumbled over against a wheel when the two cars bumped together, and——"

"Catch him, quick! He's going to fall!" cried the girl, sharply, as she saw Star hesitate and waver in his saddle.

Marcy dropped from his horse in time to catch his friend as he reeled and fell, and a minute later the detective was lying unconscious on the ground. Holding his head in her lap, Madge Wilbur commenced quickly to chafe his wrists and temples.

"That ends our searching for to-night," said Harvey promptly. "We'll just camp out quietly until daylight within sight of the wreck, and if Jess does not come back to look for his gold we'll stand a good chance to recover it."

He tethered the horses as he spoke, and then the whole party dropped upon the ground, more exhausted than they had imagined from the exciting occurrence.

When Star finally regained his senses, he was agreeably surprised to find that it was nothing more nor less than a soft kiss squarely upon the lips that had restored him.

He opened his eyes, and saw Madge bending over him, and in a second his well arm was around her waist and her head was on his shoulder.

It was a case of spontaneous affection upon both sides and the surroundings made the darts of Cupid even more pointed than usual.

"Where are the other fellows?" whispered Star, as he saw that they were alone.

"Harvey is scouting, and Marcy is back at the wrecked



trying to get some whisky for you," was the quick answer. "They'll be back in a minute," she added, slyly.

"Then kiss me again, quick!" whispered Star, passionately. "You're the bravest girl in the world! You must marry me when this miserable trip is over."

"Must I?" was the blushing reply

That was all the answer he got; but Star knew his fate when the handsome young girl bent close to him and kissed his lips passionately.

The next instant they heard Harvey approaching.

"I've found the end of the footprints and the beginning of the hoofprints, which shows where Jess was joined by his companions," began Harvey. "Now we must get some revolvers and ammunition and push on."

"But the money," broke in Star. "Shall we leave the money?"

"No use searching for that," laughed Marcy; "those fellows yonder are doing that! They came here to clear away the wreck, but they're putting in time scouring the bushes! The railroad will whistle some time before its track is clear, I guess! Those duffers have no idea of getting down to business till they have located that boodle!"

"Hello! There's something wrong! Hear them yell!" cried Star, springing to his feet. "Ten to one they've found the stuff while we are lying idle!"

"Hold on! Not so fast!" warned Harvey, who was mounted. "The wreckers have been attacked! Hark! It's the James gang, too!"

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

A volley of pistol shots from the direction of the wreck, accompanied by yells, followed the words.

Then a voice was heard above the racket:

"Throw up your hands and surrender, you whelps! A move and I'll shoot you down like dogs! I'm after that boodle, and I'm going to get it, and the man that dares to move a finger will find himself in eternity!"

Crack, crack went the weapons of the gang, and it was plainly to be seen that the "wreckers" were making a desperate resistance.

There were only two pistols among the detectives ambushed in the grass, and, as neither had any extra ammunition, it would have been foolhardy to have taken a hand in the scrimmage.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

The bullets were still flying, and it was growing light enough to see a little now, so Harvey rose to one knee and peered through the bushes, while the others lay flat upon the ground and waited for his reports on the battle that was raging.

"By Jove! Those trainmen are plucky! They've forced Jess back from the track some distance!" he cried, softly; then another volley of shots changed his report a little.

"No, they haven't! There they come, a score or more strong! Every man in the gang is masked!"

A perfect thunder of reports followed, and then a yell of triumph was sent up from a score of hoarse throats, and the outlaw gang was in possession of the wreck, the workmen going down like sheep before their hail of bullets.

Then began a scene that astonished Harvey so much that he stood erect to watch it, for the outlaws began dragging bags of gold out from the coal in the bunker and loading them on to a score of horses.

"Quick! Lie down, boys! The rascals will see you!" warned Star, a little anxiously.

His warning came too late, for, with a fiendish yell, one of the ruffians pointed that way, and then, with Jesse James at their head, the whole murderous gang swooped down upon the little party lying in ambush.



## CHAPTER XI.

## TAKEN BY SURPRISE.

In an instant the three detectives, with their companion, knelt down behind the horses, and, as the yelling gang advanced, Star emptied his revolver. Jesse James uttered a hoarse oath as his horse dropped under him, and a second later two more horses stumbled and fell, carrying their riders with them.

A shriek from an approaching engine sounded at that second, and the outlaw sprang to his feet and gave a sharp glance down the track.

"Quick! Give me your horse!" the outlaw demanded of one of his men.

The fellow dropped quietly from the saddle and sprang lightly on the back of another powerful horse, behind a companion.

Jesse James mounted and then wheeled his horse around with lightning-like rapidity.

The detectives had emptied their weapons, and were holding their breath waiting for what was to follow, but the rumble and screech of the oncoming train seemed to have distracted the outlaws' attention entirely.

"Quick, men! Break for the woods yonder!"

He dashed ahead as he spoke and made off with his men riding after him at full gallop, leaving two of their number behind them where they had fallen.

"Thank God! we're safe! Now, let's have a look at these fellows!" cried Harvey, springing forward.

"Both horses are dead and the men are dying," he reported a second later; then he calmly unbuckled their belts and handed one of them to each of his companions.

"There are four pops, so we're all right," he went on, passing an ugly-looking weapon to his fair companion, "and there's ammunition enough for one round, at least, but here is the train, and there are men enough on it to wipe out the whole James gang!"

The last exclamation was caused by a glimpse of a score of brawny workmen who were piling off of the relief train and hastening with angry shouts toward the dead and injured fellow-laborers.

The detectives got their horses on their feet and were forward at once, and, after hurried explanations, the newcomers set to work with a will.

"There they go!" cried Star, suddenly, as he caught another glimpse of the gang of outlaws scurrying over the softly-undulating country.

The sun was just above the horizon, and the horsemen could be seen distinctly making for the fringe of woods behind which they would be lost to sight entirely.

At that minute, one figure in the group rose in his stirrups, and a wide-brimmed hat was swung in the air in a taunting manner.

Star held his revolver above his head and answered the taunt with a bullet.

It was the best way he knew of demonstrating his feelings.

"That's Jess, all right! He's trying to tantalize us!" said one of the men. "He has got away in spite of us and with all that money!"

"Whoop! Look here! They've overlooked a bag!" yelled Harvey, at that minute. "Come and dump this coal, men! We may find more of the stuff!"

He was tugging at a bag of coin that he had just seen sticking out of the coal, and those of the men who were not busy with the injured started a thorough examination. Two bags were found, which reduced the amount of the stolen booty considerably, and it was Harvey's privilege to restore it to its owners later.

"There's seven deaths so far," reported the conductor, who had been working like a beaver. "Four passengers and three workmen."

"There's a dead outlaw on the other train, whom I



lled," remarked Harvey, coolly. "And there are two more down yonder in the bushes."

"Then the thief didn't have it all his own way," huckled the man.

The balance of the day was spent in clearing the racks, and as there was nothing else to be done, the three detectives assisted the workmen in various ways, while Madge, whose sex had not been guessed by the workmen, looked after the injured.

Twenty-four hours after their arrival in Denver, she and Star were married, and a wedding tour was planned that was decidedly novel.

Star was under orders to continue his search for Jesse James, and as Madge had sworn to avenge her father's death, she insisted upon accompanying him.

"Once in the James' gang, there is no quitting it," she said, bitterly. "Well, Jesse James shall see that we have a motto, too! It is, 'once on the trail of Jesse James, there is no going back!' We must capture and kill that infamous rascal!"

"We'll do our best!" was Star's answer, and a week later they were at Laramie City, having heard that the outlaw was hiding somewhere in that vicinity.

Star took a room at the principal hotel in the city and, after they had been there an hour, he sauntered down to the office.

Four rough-looking men were standing at the desk and the clerk—an inoffensive-looking fellow—was having an altercation with some one.

"I tell yer I've lost ther sparkler, an' I hold ther house responsible," growled the angry fellow. "I wouldn't hev took er clean thousan' for the stun, an' I reckon now some one's got ter pay fer it!"

"Yer must be er tenderfoot ef them's yer sentiments, stranger," returned the clerk, and as he spoke he turned and faced the fellow.

In a second two revolvers were aimed at his head, while Star was astonished to find himself covered by the third one.

Then the fourth man of the party leaped over the desk, and, drawing out the money drawer, deftly emptied its contents.

"Thieves! Robbers! Help!" yelled the clerk, growing as white as chalk.

"Shut up! Another yell and I'll put a bullet through your heart!" roared a familiar voice, and then the man who had taken the money walked calmly to the door leading out onto the main street of the city.

As he did so, Star recognized Jesse James, and, making a grab for his hip pocket, he started after him.

"Halt! A move, and you're a dead man!" hissed a voice in his ear; then one of the three ruffians calmly stepped in front of him.

"We've got orders ter detain any one who happens ter come in hyar afore ther cap'n gits away," he said, coolly. "Sorry yer one of ther number, but we won't keep yer long. Ther express leaves in a minute, an' then yer kin go ter blazes!"

"Are you the James gang?" blurted out Star, who had been taken entirely by surprise.

"I reckon we be now; an', stranger, jest put up yer hands an' keep 'em thet thar way fer a minute, will ye? I reckon now it's time we was goin'!"

He backed toward the door as he spoke, his companions following, and as they reached the threshold they made a lightning-like rush for the street.

The door slammed behind them, leaving the clerk and Star both standing like statues, but in less than a second they were both in the street, yelling at the passers-by to stop the rascals.

It was no use! If the robbers had been winged they could not have gone faster. They darted around the



corner, and into an alley, emerging upon a network of car tracks five minutes later.

Here in the tangle of cars and coal heaps they were lost entirely, and by the time the town was aroused they had disappeared without leaving so much as a trace behind them.

The other two detectives were at another hotel, and, when Star related his experience, they were too chagrined for utterance.

The famous outlaw had outwitted them at every turn; but this fact only made them more determined to pursue and capture him.

They stayed in Laramie City until the next train left for the far West, but were obliged to begin the trail from there in absolute ignorance of the outlaws' movements, and it was many days before they found a clew that was worth following.

That they searched faithfully and for a long time, but

it was not for either of these brave fellows or Mad Wilbur to finally drive Jesse James to cover, although they managed to harass him in many instances.

Both Jess and the money disappeared from public view for a time, but the next authentic report of the outlaw was that he and Frank were hiding in Dakota and that Mrs. James had left Frisco to join her husband.

The people of St. Louis watched and waited for another visit from the James gang, but, having escaped from their clutches once, Frank did not care to go back, and Jesse James found plenty to do on the other side of the Rockies.

THE END.

Next week's JESSE JAMES STORIES (No 19) will contain, "Jesse James at Bay; or, The Train Robbers' Trail," a story of some of the noted outlaw's most thrilling experiences in his old stamping ground in Missouri.

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